GENESIS
I-XXV.

REV. W. H.
GRIFFITH THOMAS, D.D.

A DEVOTIONAL
COMMENTARY

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A DEVOTIONAL COMMENTARY
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GENESIS

I.—XXV. 10

A DEVOTIONAL COMMENTARY

By the

Rev. W. H. GRIFFITH THOMAS, D.D.
Principal of Wycliffe Hall, Oxford

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I

INTRODUCTION

THE first book of the Bible is for several reasons one of the most interesting and fascinating portions of Scripture. Its place in the Canon, its relation to the rest of the Bible, and the varied and striking character of its contents combine to make it one of the most prominent in Holy Writ. It is with a real spiritual insight, therefore, that the people of God in all ages have fastened upon this book, and given it their earnest attention. It is also a testimony to its value and importance that criticism of various kinds and degrees has also concentrated itself upon this first book of the Bible. Its substance and claim are far too important to be overlooked.

Introduction.

The Book: Its Interest.

In the Hebrew the title of the book is taken from its first words, *Bereshîth* ('In the beginning'). The title of the Authorised Version, following the Septuagint, refers to the contents of the book. It is a book of 'beginnings,' and is true to this idea throughout.

Its Title.

I. *Its Purpose.*—As the purpose is not definitely stated in any part of the book, it is, of course, necessary to read it through in order to gain an idea of the author's meaning and object. It should there-

Its Purpose.

Introduction.

fore be read through at one time, so as to gain an adequate idea both of its contents and proportion. Indeed, the oftener it can be read right through at once with this aim the better, more particularly as we are accustomed to read it merely in chapters or sections. It is only as the book is carefully read and pondered that its purpose becomes manifest.

Characteristics of i.—xi., and of xii. i.

The first thing that strikes us is the summary and fragmentary character of the first eleven chapters, and the fulness of detail in the remainder of the book, the latter chapters (xii. to l.) dealing practically with only four men. Eleven chapters are thus concerned with the affairs of the human race, and thirty-nine chapters with one family. This, ordinarily, would seem very disproportionate, but in fact it is really an indication of the specific purpose of the book. The first eleven chapters are evidently introductory to the rest. Abraham is clearly the central figure of the book, chapters xii. 1 to xxv. 10 being devoted to him; and all that follows is seen to be closely connected with, and to arise out of, the record of his life. If, then, we take our stand, as it were, at the beginning of chapter xii. and look backwards and forwards we can see (1) the descent of Abraham from Adam, and (2) the descendants of Abraham.

History with a Purpose.

It must be evident from these simple facts that there was no intention of writing an universal history of man, but only of recording the development of the Divine will and purpose for and through Abraham. It is history written with a special purpose. The book might easily have begun with

Abraham if the purpose had been to record the ordinary history of an ordinary people; yet inasmuch as Israel was not an ordinary people, but charged with God's purposes for the whole of mankind, it was necessary to show—at least in brief form—the connection between the progenitor of the human race and Abraham, in whom and in whose descendants the Divine purpose was to be realised. Introduction.

The two main divisions, therefore, are chapters i. to xi. and chapters xii. to l. The former section can be divided by the Flood, and the two parts referred respectively to Adam as the head of the original race, and to Noah as the head of the new race. Then follows the record of Abraham, the head of the family through which God's purposes for the race were to be fulfilled, and the story of his three great descendants—Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph. Before proceeding to a more detailed consideration of the book it is essential that these main outlines should be clearly in view.

II. *Its Plan.*—Taking up the book again for the purpose of fuller study, as we look at it more closely we become conscious of the recurrence of a phrase, 'These are the generations,' or 'The book of the generations,' and we observe that it occurs no fewer than ten times. Inasmuch as nine of these are without doubt superscriptions, and are therefore closely connected with what follows, it is a strong argument in favour of the view that the first of these occurrences is to be interpreted in the same way: 'These are the generations of the heaven and Plan of the Work.

Introduction.

the earth' (chap. ii. 4). It refers, not to what precedes, but to what follows. This view is clearly borne out by the meaning of the word translated 'generations' (*Toledoth*), which comes from the Hebrew *Yalad* ('to beget'), and invariably refers to results, not causes; not to ancestry, but to descendants; not to origin, but to effects.

Its Analysis.

The book should therefore be analysed as follows:—

1. Introduction.—The Creation. (Chap. i. 1 to ii. 3.)
2. The Generations of the Heaven and the Earth. (Chap. ii. 4 to iv. 26.)
3. The Generations of Adam. (Chap. v. 1 to vi. 8.)
4. The Generations of Noah. (Chap. vi. 9 to ix. 29.)
5. The Generations of the Sons of Noah. (Chap. x. 1 to xi. 9.)
6. The Generations of Shem. (Chap. xi. 10-26.)
7. The Generations of Terah. (Chap. xi. 27 to xxv. 11.)
8. The Generations of Ishmael. (Chap. xxv. 12-18.)
9. The Generations of Isaac. (Chap. xxv. 19 to xxxv. 29.)
10. The Generations of Esau. (Chap. xxxvi. 1 to xxxvii. 1.)
11. The Generations of Jacob. (Chap. xxxvii. 2 to l. 26.)

All thorough study of the Book of Genesis in the light of its structure, purpose, and plan should pro-

ceed along these lines. The book is thus seen to be in great measure a compilation of family documents; the author, whoever he was and whenever he wrote, made use of pre-existing materials, as was the case in the composition of the Gospels (Luke i. 1-4), and welded together the whole into a striking and beautiful unity. The record is thereby shown to partake of a genealogical character, and this is due to the author's purpose of tracing the fulfilments of God's purposes of redemption through the line of the chosen people. These genealogies are consequently an essential part of the book, and form a consecutive series from Adam to Jacob. Although, as it has been often pointed out, they are occasionally interrupted for the purpose of introducing collateral and connected facts, the thread is soon resumed and the main purpose never allowed to go out of sight.

Introduction. Family Documents.

We may therefore describe the present Book of Genesis as consisting of an introduction, and ten books representing ten sections or stages of history, each complete in itself. It is worth while noticing once again, that in the course of bringing forward these successive genealogies the plan is to deal with collateral branches first, before dwelling upon the main line of descent in regard to the purpose of redemption. Thus the genealogy of Cain comes before that of Seth, those of Ham and Canaan before Shem, that of Terah before Abraham, those of Ishmael and Esau before Isaac and Jacob. All the apparent deviations are strictly according to the idea of the book as a book of

Introduction.

beginnings. As it has been well said, 'Genesis is full of geneses.'[1]

Its Unity.

III. *Its Unity.*—It is generally admitted, even by men of very different schools, that our present Book of Genesis is a unity, however that unity has been brought about. For this reason it should be studied as a whole, and allowed to make its own definite and deep impression upon the reader. As Dr Whitelaw (*Pulpit Commentary*, p. viii.) truly says, there is a chronological thread running through the entire book, and all its parts are so interdependent that if one were omitted it would create a gap, and entirely rob the book of its unity. There are few facts more certain than that of the literary unity of Genesis as it has come down to us, and no study of the book will arrive at right conclusions unless this fact is kept well in view.

Value of the Book.

IV. *Its Value.*—As the title clearly indicates, it is essentially and pre-eminently a book of origins; it deals with a number of characteristic 'beginnings.' It records the beginning of creation, of man, of woman, of the Sabbath, of marriage, of home, of childhood, of sin, of murder, of sacrifice, of grace, of trade, of agriculture, of city life, of races, of languages, and of the chosen people.

In the light of its title and evident purpose it is worthy of notice that there are in particular seven important 'beginnings' recorded and dealt with in this book:—

1. The beginning of the material universe, or the Sphere of the Divine revelation of grace.

[1] *Cf.* Green's *Unity of the Book of Genesis.*

2. The beginning of the human race, or the Subject of the Divine revelation of grace. Introduction.

3. The beginning of human sin, or the Cause of the Divine revelation of grace.

4. The beginning of divine redemption, or the Character of the Divine revelation of grace.

5. The beginning of the nations of the earth, or the Scope of the Divine revelation of grace.

6. The beginning of the Hebrew nation, or the Channel of the Divine revelation of grace.

7. The beginning of the life of faith and consecration, or the Outcome of the Divine revelation of grace.

The first four words form the keynote of the book, which is struck again and again throughout the record—'In the beginning God.' It is essentially a book where God is prominent and predominant, notwithstanding human wilfulness, wandering, and wretchedness through sin.

God in Creation.—The outstanding impression derived from the story in chapter i. is that the universe is not self-originated, but is the result of the Creator's handiwork. 'God saw,' 'God said,' 'God made,' are the prominent teachings. God in Creation.

God in History.—In this book we have the dawn of history and the earliest years of the life and progress of the human race; and although the narrative of the first eleven chapters takes various literary forms, and is only brought before us in very summary fashion, there is no doubt of the essential historical character of the events underlying the record. And when we come to God in History.

Introduction.

the fuller details of the patriarchal narratives we can readily appreciate the truth of Dr Driver's *dictum* with reference to the parts of 2 Samuel: 'The abundance and particularity of detail show that the narratives must date from a period very little later than that of the events related' (*Intro. O.T.*, p. 173). No student of history can afford to overlook the instructive and fascinating record contained in the first book of the Bible.

God in Providence.

God in Providence.—No book in the world shows so clearly the truth that 'There's a Divinity that shapes our ends, rough hew them how we will.' From the time that man was created, God's providence is seen watching over him, warning him, checking him, overruling his mistakes, and, in spite of his wilfulness, carrying out the Divine purpose. In the record of the ages before the Flood and of the time of the Deluge, in the stories of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph, we see step by step the working of that 'never-failing providence that ordereth all things in heaven and earth.'

God in Redemption.

God in Redemption.—This is the most important, even though it is not the most prominent, feature on the surface of the book. Genesis has been well summed up in three words—generation, degeneration, regeneration. The great promise of redemption recorded in chapter iii. is taken up and gradually prepared for through a long line from Seth through Noah, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. In this connection, too, we must not overlook the typological value of Genesis, for it is a book of type as well as

of prophecy, of picture as well as of promise. From the sacrifice of Abel straight onward to the sacrifice of Isaac, the vision of Jacob at Bethel, and the story of Joseph, we have picture after picture of redemption, which find their full meaning, vividness, and glory, in the New Testament revelation, until at length in Jacob's benediction we have a striking reference to the primeval fact of sin and the primeval promise of salvation (chap. xlix. 17, 18). The red thread of redemption binds every chapter together, and gives the book one of its essential marks of unity. Introduction.

God in Human Life.—Not the least interesting and valuable feature of this most remarkable book is its record of human life in relation to God. As we read the stories from Adam to Joseph, we see various aspects of the Divine revelation in regard to personal life, and the various attitudes of human response to that revelation. The book is of pre-eminent value, because it has to do with the essential and abiding elements of God's relation to man, and man's relation to God. As we study point after point in individual history and character, we see abundant proofs of spiritual guidance, warning, encouragement, and cheer, and we become more and more convinced of the truth of the Apostolic word, that 'Whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning.' God in Human Life.

In the foregoing remarks critical questions have been deliberately avoided, in order to concentrate attention on the importance of a study of the book itself. It is to be feared that there is often a good The Testimony of Three Witnesses.

Introduction.

deal of knowledge *about* Genesis without too much knowledge of the book itself. If only we would allow it to make its own impression by direct and prolonged study, apart from all authorities, it would go far to instruct us as to its own real character. Even so extreme a critic as Kuenen bears witness to the value of direct Bible study when he says:—

'The Bible is in every one's hand. The critic has no other Bible than the public. He does not profess to have any other documents inaccessible to the laity, nor does he profess to see anything in the Bible that the ordinary reader cannot see. It is true that here and there he improves the common translation, but this is the exception, and not the rule.'

And that great scholar, Dr M'Caul, gives a very valuable reminder to all Bible readers in the following words:—

'No reader of the Authorised Version ought to allow himself to be mystified or silenced by an appeal to foreign critics, much less to be disturbed in his faith, as if he could not apprehend the general teaching of the Bible without profound knowledge of the Semitic dialects and the latest results of German criticism.'

We cannot do better than close with a striking testimony to the value of Genesis from a scholar whose books on the Old Testament have proved so valuable and convincing during recent years, Professor James Robertson, of Glasgow:—

'It may be a matter of criticism to discover the joinings of the narratives, and to trace the literary process by which the book took its present shape; but it is of far deeper interest to note the existence of a pure light in the midst of the world's darkness. It is our familiarity with it that

makes us overlook the significance of the early testimony of the Hebrew people to the truth of the one God. But when we reflect that, at a time when the great nations of antiquity were stumbling in the dark on this subject, or groping their way towards it, the Hebrew race had it as their oldest tradition, we cannot but acknowledge that they received it from God Himself. And of far higher importance is it to our faith than the anticipation of the results of modern science would have been, to be assured that from hoary antiquity the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ has been guiding our race and preparing it for the fulness of the times.' Introduction.

For the purpose of general study as distinct from critical questions two works may be mentioned: *How to Read the Bible*, vols. i. and ii., by the Rev. J. Urquhart, and *Genesis*, in the *Pulpit Commentary*, by Dr Whitelaw. Critical questions can be most conveniently studied in the following works: (1) From the standpoint of modern criticism, in Dr Driver's *Commentary*. (2) From the conservative side, in Green's *Unity of the Book of Genesis*, Dr Redpath's *Modern Criticism and Genesis* (a criticism of Dr Driver), and Dr Orr's *Problem of the Old Testament* (see Index *s.v.* Genesis).

II

THE CREATION

Gen. i.

In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.

And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness *was* upon the face of the deep: and the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.

And God said, Let there be light: and there was light.

And God saw the light, that *it was* good; and God divided the light from the darkness.

And God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And the evening and the morning were the first day.

And God said, Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters.

And God made the firmament, and divided the waters which *were* under the firmament, from the waters which *were* above the firmament: and it was so.

And God called the firmament Heaven. And the evening and the morning were the second day.

And God said, Let the waters under the heaven be gathered together unto one place, and let the dry *land* appear: and it was so.

And God called the dry *land* Earth; and the gathering together of the waters called He Seas: and God saw that *it was* good.

And God said, Let the earth bring forth grass, the herb yielding seed, *and* the fruit-tree yielding fruit after his kind, whose seed *is* in itself, upon the earth: and it was so.

And the earth brought forth grass, *and* herb yielding seed after his kind, and the tree yielding fruit, whose seed *was* in itself, after his kind: and God saw that *it was* good.

And the evening and the morning were the third day.

And God said, Let there be lights in the firmament of the heaven, to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs, and for seasons, and for days, and years.

And let them be for lights in the firmament of the heaven, to give light upon the earth: and it was so.

And God made two great lights; the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night: *He made* the stars also.

And God set them in the firmament of the heaven, to give light upon the earth.

And to rule over the day and over the night, and to divide the light from the darkness: and God saw that *it was* good.

And the evening and the morning were the fourth day.

And God said, Let the waters bring forth abundantly the moving creature that hath life, and fowl *that* may fly above the earth in the open firmament of heaven.

And God created great whales, and every living creature that moveth, which the waters brought forth abundantly, after their kind, and every winged fowl after his kind: and God saw that *it was* good.

And God blessed them, saying, Be fruitful, and multiply, and fill the waters in the seas, and let fowl multiply in the earth.

And the evening and the morning were the fifth day.

And God said, Let the earth bring forth the living creature after his kind, cattle, and creeping thing, and beast of the earth after his kind: and it was so.

And God made the beast of the earth after his kind, and cattle after their kind, and every thing that creepeth upon the earth after his kind: and God saw that *it was* good.

And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth.

So God created man in His *own* image, in the image of God created He him: male and female created He them.

And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.

And God said, Behold, I have given you every herb bearing seed, which *is* upon the face of all the earth, and every tree, in the which *is* the fruit of a tree yielding seed; to you it shall be for meat.

And to every beast of the earth, and to every fowl of the air, and to every thing that creepeth upon the earth, wherein *there is* life, *I have given* every green herb for meat: and it was so.

And God saw every thing that He had made, and, behold, *it was* very good. And the evening and the morning were the sixth day.

Gen. i.

OF all the chapters of this remarkable book the first has probably given rise to more thought, discussion, and controversy than any other. Nor is this surprising, remembering its contents and the place it occupies at the beginning of the Book of God. And assuredly it will repay the fullest and minutest attention, study, and meditation. In order to arrive at a right conclusion as to its meaning and object, it will be necessary to bring into view several considerations.

Character of the Narrative.

I. *What is its Character?*—The first essential is that we try to discover what the chapter really is.

Is it history? This were obviously impossible, since no one was present to observe and record for posterity the events here stated. The contents clearly refer to prehistoric events and times.

Is it science? This at any rate can hardly be the primary purpose of the writer, for the Bible is a book of religion, and this is its introductory chapter. Besides, science is continuous and incomplete, and we are learning more and more of its secrets every day. In any case this chapter could only be scientific in the broadest and most summary meaning of the term.

Is it myth? If by this is meant that which is inaccurate, untrustworthy, legendary, and, in modern phraseology, 'mythical,' we naturally ask whether such inaccuracy and untrustworthiness are likely to be found in a book of religion. But if by myth is meant a form of picturesque teaching suited to the childhood of the world, it may be said that even

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if it be a myth in *form*, its underlying teaching and details must be true to *fact*. Even parabolic teaching presupposes facts which correspond to the symbol used. Gen. i.

When we compare other cosmogonies, such as the Babylonian, we notice at once some remarkable agreements and some equally remarkable contrasts. All cosmogonies, for instance, have traces of a primeval chaos, yet their moral atmosphere is entirely different from that of Genesis, and they have nothing corresponding to the great statement of verse 1: 'In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth.' Moreover, the Babylonian cosmogony is, as is well known, religiously impure, with materialistic and polytheistic elements.

Is it invention? By this is meant, Is it the work of man's imagination, the record of what some early writer thought *must* have happened or did happen? If so, we naturally ask why it appears in a book purporting to be the Word of God?

Is it revelation? That is, is it to be regarded as an integral part of the Book which has come down to us as (in whatever sense) the inspired Scriptures of God? The precise *method* of revelation we know not, and it does not concern us to know; but the *fact* of revelation, and the place of this chapter in the book and in the Bible generally, seems to compel the inquiry, Is it invention or revelation? Is it in any sense trustworthy in what it says? Can we use it in confidence in reading and teaching? Its place in Scripture must be accounted for

Gen. i.

as also its position in a book whose characteristic is truth, and whose purpose is to reveal the God of truth.

Hebrew and Babylonian Cosmogonies.

There are two usual explanations of the points of contact between the Hebrew and Babylonian cosmogonies. (1) Some urge that Genesis is to be traced from Babylonia, but was afterwards purified, the Hebrew writer using the best of sources available, and making them the vehicle of religious teaching. Apart from the likelihood or unlikelihood of any direct borrowing from so impure a source, we may fairly inquire whether this view is adequate in the light of any true theory of Divine inspiration. And even though we limit the idea of inspiration to the arrangement and use of materials, to what has been called the 'inspiration of selection,' the prior question still remains as to the source of those materials, and also their reliableness and accuracy. Surely we need some guarantee at this initial point. (2) Others say that the Babylonian cosmogony is the corrupt version of which Genesis is the pure record received from primal revelation. Is not this view much more likely to be true, and also much more in keeping with the idea of a Divine inspiration? When we remember the longevity of the human race up to the time of Abraham, there is nothing insuperably difficult in the view that this pure cosmogony may have been preserved among the antediluvians, and brought from Mesopotamia by Abraham without any corruption. At any rate, we have to account for the fact that this pure

cosmogony is found among the Hebrews, while an impure cosmogony is found in Babylonia. Surely Divine inspiration is the only adequate solution of the problem. If the substance of this chapter is not revelation it must be, in whatever sense, invention or fiction; and in the latter case it really matters not whence it came or by what process it has arrived at its present state. In view, therefore, of the uniqueness of the Hebrew race, the place of this chapter in the Bible, and the general idea of Divine inspiration associated with the Old Testament, it seems much easier and truer to believe that we have in this chapter the record of a primeval revelation. Gen. i.

The following remarks from Lange's *Commentary on Genesis* (p. 147) seem to sum up the truth on this subject:— Lange's Testimony.

'Holiness, sublimity, truthfulness—these are the impressions left upon the mind of the thoughtful reader of the First of Genesis. There is meant by this its subjective truthfulness. It is no invention. The one who first wrote it down, or first spoke it to human ears, had a perfect conscious conviction of the presence to his mind of the scenes so vividly described—whether given to him in vision or otherwise—and a firm belief in a great objective reality represented by them. It is equally evident, too, that it is the offspring of one conceiving mind. It never grew like a myth or legend. It is one total conception, perfect and consistent in all its parts. It bears no evidence of being a story artificially made to represent an idea, or a system of ideas. There is, in truth, nothing ideal about it. It presents on its very face the serious impression of *fact* believed, and given forth

Gen. i.

as thus believed, however the original representation may have been made to the first human soul that received it. Myths and legends are the products of time ; they have a growth ; we can, in general, tell how and whence they came, and after what manner they have received their mythical form. Thus other ancient cosmogonies, though bearing evidence of derivation from the one in Genesis, have had their successive accretions and deposits of physical, legendary, and mythological strata. This stands alone in the world, like the primeval granite of the Himalaya among the later geological formations. It has nothing national about it. It is no more Jewish than it is Assyrian, Chaldæan, Indian, Persian, or Egyptian. It is found among the preserved Jewish writings, but there is nothing, except its pure monotheistic aspect, which would assign it to that people rather than to any other. If the Jews derived it from others, as is often affirmed, then is it something very wonderful, something utterly the reverse of the usual process, that they should have so stripped it of all national or sect features, and given it such a sublime aspect of universalism, so transcending, apparently, all local or partial history.'

Purpose of the Narrative.

II. *What is its Purpose?*—We must never forget that a chapter like this, as indeed every chapter of the Bible, must be judged primarily from the standpoint of those for whom it was originally intended. What did the first readers understand by it? Still more, what were they intended to understand by it? It must have had an intelligible message for them, however imperfectly and incompletely they grasped it. If, therefore, this chapter had been written in scientific language it would have been almost entirely unintelligible until the nineteenth century of our present era. Indeed, we may go very much further and say that many of

the scientific books in our own language written a century ago are not only superseded, but practically unintelligible in the light of modern research. We are, therefore, justified in regarding this chapter as giving a simple, popular account of creation from the religious standpoint, and intended to be understood by people who lived in the time of the world's childhood. Its elementary character and religious purpose are the twofold key to its true meaning, and if this is continually borne in mind it will not be difficult to see its continued value up to the present day. The great fundamental yet elementary principles connected with the creation need to be taught to succeeding generations of people of various ages and capacities, and it is one of the most remarkable features in the experience of Christian teaching that this chapter is found to be adapted to intellectual and moral childhood in all ages and countries, and at the same time not inappropriate to mature minds and fuller knowledge. Gen. i.

III. *What is its Plan?*—There are those who think that verse 1 refers to the original creation, and that then between verses 1 and 2 room is left for the vast geological ages with their catastrophes which are thought to be described by the phrase 'the earth was without form and void.' This is urged more particularly because we read in Is. xlv. 18 that God did not create 'without form' (same word in Hebrew). According to this view, verse 2 to the end of the chapter gives the story of the earth being fashioned for man's life and habitation just Plan of the Narrative.

Gen. i. prior to the historic period. This view, though not generally accepted, is interesting and suggestive, and has not a little to recommend it, even though it does not solve every problem.

Taking the chapter, however, just as it stands, without any such break, we read it through, and are at once impressed with two things: (1) There is only one species mentioned in the entire chapter, 'And God created great whales' (ver. 21). Everything else is generic. Why this exceptional reference? Why are these 'water monsters' singled out in this way? Is it possible that we have here a hint of the writer's purpose? Was he striking at the root of some ancient worship of sacred animals? Is it impossible that if the materials for the composition of Genesis were associated with Egypt this has reference to the worship of some sacred animal like the crocodile? (See *Miracles*, by Dr S. Cox.) (2) Then in verse 16 special reference is made to the creation of the sun and moon. Is it possible that we have here another blow to a prevalent form of Eastern worship of the heavenly bodies? These two hints at any rate possibly suggest the religious purpose of the writer.

It is noteworthy that in the Hebrew of verse 2 the adjectives 'formless' and 'empty' seem to be the key to the literary structure of the chapter. The record of the first three days refers to the heaven and earth receiving their 'form,' and the record of the last three days to the filling-up of their 'emptiness.' An outline will show this clearly:—

'Formless'		'Empty'		Gen. i.
First Day.	Light.	Fourth Day.	Lights.	
Second Day.	Air. / Water.	Fifth Day.	Fowls. / Fish.	
Third Day.	Land. / Plants.	Sixth Day.	Animals. / Man.	

Thus, the first and fourth days correspond, the second and fifth, and the third and sixth. First comes 'form,' and then 'fulness.' The literary structure of the chapter is clear, and is one of many proofs of Hebrew parallelism and love of parallelistic structure.

Above all, the keynote of the chapter is 'In the beginning God.' The word 'God' occurs no fewer than thirty-two times; 'God created' four times; 'God said' eight times; 'God saw' seven times; 'God made' three times; 'It was so' (God's purpose) six times. So also we find 'God called,' 'God set,' 'God blessed,' 'God divided.'

Are we not right, then, in thinking that this chapter was intended as an account of creation from the religious point of view, and written for the instruction of mankind in all ages?

IV. *What is its Relation to Science?*—It is inevitable that this question should be asked, since on the assumption that religion and science both come from God there should be at least some general agreement or points of contact between them. At the same time the truest method of

Relation to Science.

Gen. i. comparison is not between this chapter and the results of modern science, but rather between this chapter and all other ancient cosmogonies. It is when Genesis is compared with such other ancient accounts of creation that its immeasurable superiority is seen (Waggett, *The Scientific Temper in Religion*, pp. 160 *ff*). Nevertheless, in view of natural questionings, and bearing in mind the evident purpose of the chapter as an account of creation from the religious standpoint, the following inquiries with reference to its relation to science may rightly be made.

Absence of Error. Does the chapter contain any scientific error? On the authority of the greatest masters of geological and biological science we may say that this has not yet been proved. There was a time when the statement of the creation of light before the sun was regarded as a scientific inaccuracy, but this charge has long been dropped, for modern science has shown that light existed before and independent of our present sun. In entire keeping with this the Hebrew distinguishes between light (ver. 3) and luminaries, or light-bearers (ver. 15).

Elasticity of Language. Is the chapter written in sufficiently elastic and pliant language to admit of the inclusion of continuous scientific discoveries? It must be obvious to every thoughtful reader that this early chapter could not be expected to be in exact agreement with the latest details of scientific research, since science is continually changing and is ever incomplete. If it had been written in strict

scientific language it would, of course, have been unintelligible for centuries. As the *Speaker's Commentary* rightly says:— Gen. i.

> 'If the wisest geologist of our days could show that there was an exact agreement between geology and the Bible, it would rather disprove than prove its truth. For, as geology is a growing science, it would prove the agreement of the Bible with that which is receiving daily additions, and is constantly undergoing modification; and ten years hence the two would be at hopeless variance.'

Yet there are indications that the very language of Genesis is pliant enough to allow of not a little scientific discovery being inserted. Thus there are two words used for creation. One, *Bara*, is used three times only in the chapter—(1) at the beginning (ver. 1); (2) at the commencement of life (ver. 21); (3) at the creation of man (ver. 27). '*Bara* is thus reserved for marking the first introduction of each of the three great spheres of creation—the world of matter, the world of life, and the spiritual world represented by man' (Green). The other word, *Asah*, is found throughout the rest of the chapter, and is used of God making or moulding from already created materials. Surely in this we have at least a hint of the modern scientific ideas of primal creation and mediate creation.

In a fascinating book, *The Conflict of Truth* (by Mr F. H. Capron), the author refers to the five factors which Mr Herbert Spencer regards as 'the most general forms into which the manifestations of the Unknowable are re-divisible.' These forms are said to be: Space, time, matter, motion, force.

Gen. i.

Mr Capron calls attention to the suggestive and even remarkable analogy between these forms and the early verses of Genesis i.

(*a*) Time = 'In the beginning.'
(*b*) Space = 'The heavens.'
(*c*) Matter = 'The earth.'
(*d*) Force = 'The Spirit of God.'
(*e*) Motion = 'Moved.'

Even though we may think it too ingenious to be true, there is ample proof, apart from this, to lead to the conclusion that there is—at any rate, up to the present—nothing in the chapter which conflicts with any assured results of science.

Anticipations of Discovery.

Has the chapter any anticipations of science as revealed by modern research? We may reply by calling attention to the fact that there is the same general order of events. The steps of the creation of vegetation, reptiles, mammals, and man are essentially true to modern science. Professor Romanes admitted that—

'The order in which the flora and fauna are said by the Mosaic account to have appeared upon the earth corresponds with that which the theory of evolution requires and the evidence of geology proves' (quoted in M'Cosh, *The Religious Aspect of Evolution*, p. 99).

And Sir William Dawson, whose scientific eminence and authority no one can question, states still more definitely that—

'The *order* of that vision of the creative work with which the Bible begins its history is so closely in harmony with the results worked out by geological investigations that the

correspondences have excited marked attention, and have been justly regarded as establishing the common authorship of nature and revelation.' Gen. i.

Has the chapter any indications of development and progress answering to the great modern theory of evolution? A very superficial reading of the chapter shows that development, progress, and change are among its leading ideas. The term 'day' is regarded by some high authorities as expressive of the ages or epochs of science. They urge that the term 'day' does not, and was not intended to mean a period of twenty-four hours, since it is applied to the first three days before the sun and moon—our present means of measurement—are introduced into the narrative. And, further, that in chapter ii. 4 the term 'day' is used for the whole period of creation. There are certainly many places in Scripture where the word 'day' refers to other periods than that of the rotation of the earth.[1] Genesis and Evolution.

Has the chapter any points of contact with modern biological and anthropological teaching Contact with Modern Teaching.

[1] Another view which has much to recommend it is that 'in the six days God *pronounced* all the laws upon which the production of phenomena depends,' that those laws thus pronounced were 'the only operative agencies of production,' and that nothing remained to be *done* but to 'allow the laws to take effect and bring into existence the various phenomena which they have produced and are still producing to-day.' On this interpretation an interval is to be understood between 'God said' and 'it was so,' an interval as to which the Bible is silent, but which may have extended for ages. (For a full statement of this view see Capron, *Conflict of Truth*, chap. xi. and xii., especially p. 193.)

Gen. i. about man's nature? The answer is plain. On the one hand the chapter teaches clearly an essential unity of man with animate and inanimate nature, and at the same time it teaches with equal clearness man's separateness from nature and his transcendence in view of his creation in the image of God. Thus modern science and ancient Genesis are at one as to the complexity of man's nature, and also as to its unity at once with earth and heaven.

Reviewing the relations of this chapter to modern science, we again call attention to the definitely religious aim and object of Genesis, and may say that while the chapter is scientifically incomplete it is not scientifically inaccurate. On the other hand, religiously, it is both accurate and complete.

Nor can we fail to ask how this correspondence between Genesis and science is to be explained. How are we to account for such anticipations of modern science in this early book? Even Haeckel admits that

> 'two great and fundamental ideas, common also to the non-miraculous, meet us in the Mosaic hypothesis of creation with surprising clearness and simplicity—the idea of separation or differentiation and the idea of progressive development or perfecting. . . . In this theory there lies hidden the ruling idea of a progressive development and differentiation of the originally simple matter. We can therefore bestow our just and sincere admiration of the Jewish law-giver's grand insight into nature' (quoted by M'Cosh, *The Religious Aspect of Evolution*, pp. 99, 100).

May we not rightly see in this record a clear proof of Divine inspiration? There is surely noth-

ing in all these correspondences which could have come into the ken of Moses by purely natural means. Gen. i.

To quote Sir William Dawson again :—

'All these coincidences cannot be accidental. They are the more remarkable when we consider the primitive and child-like character of the notices in Genesis, making no scientific pretensions, and introducing what they tell us of primitive man merely to explain and illustrate the highest moral and religious teachings. Truth and divinity are stamped on every line of the early chapters of Genesis, alike in their archaic simplicity, and in that accuracy as to facts which enables them not only to stand unharmed amid the discoveries of modern science, but to display new beauties as we are able more and more fully to compare them with the records stored up from old in the recesses of the earth. Those who base their hopes for the future on the glorious revelations of the Bible need not be ashamed of its story of the past.'

V. *What is its Religious Teaching?* The primary and fundamental truth of this chapter is, 'In the beginning God created.' It teaches that the world is not self-originated, and thereby declares, what science compels us to demand, the fact of a First Cause. The nebular hypothesis of Laplace is the best scientific account of the solar system, and yet it is obvious that this hypothesis only accounts for the second verse of Genesis i., not the first. Laplace's theory presupposes a central sun and an atmospheric envelope, but Genesis i. 1 goes behind this nebular hypothesis and gives the explanation of its revolution in the creative *fiat* of God. This simple thought of creation is very

Its Religious Teaching.

—As to the Creator.

Gen. i.

familiar to us to-day, but, as is well known, it was not so evident to all the thinkers and all the nations of the old world. Some of the earliest peoples had no idea of absolute creation, and most assuredly it never was so clear and unmistakable in any part of the world as it was among the Hebrews. In view of the fact that 'the notion of creation is one which had not dawned on the ancient Greek mind,' and was 'never securely attained in the thought of Greece,' we can perhaps realise a little of the immense benefit the world has derived from this chapter (Waggett, *The Scientific Temper in Religion*, pp. 165 *f.*).

—As to Man.

The chapter also teaches us that man is the crown and culmination of creation, that he is the earthly end for which creation has been made and developed, and that in his life there is the promise and potency of God-likeness. Nothing could be clearer than the teaching of this chapter as to the spiritual nature of man and the spiritual purpose for which he was made. Again to quote Sir William Dawson:—

> 'In man there are other and higher powers, determining his conscious personality, his formation of general principles, his rational and moral volitions and self-restraints. These are manifestations of a higher spiritual nature, which constitute in man the image and shadow of God.'

—As to Matter.

The chapter also declares that matter is not eternal; it teaches clearly that absolute dualism, that refuge of many ancient Eastern thinkers, is entirely impossible and foreign to the whole idea of true religion.

Not least significant is the simple but conclusive way in which this chapter deals with some of the most characteristic errors of ancient and modern thought. In opposition to Atheism it proclaims God; in opposition to Polytheism it emphasises one God; in opposition to Pantheism it declares the separateness of God and the world; in opposition to Materialism it reveals the spirituality of God and man. Gen. i.

And thus we find ourselves coming back again and again to the first verse, 'In the beginning God,' and we rest both mind and heart on the familiar words. 'Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the Word of God.' Let us mark this expression with great care. 'Through faith we understand.' Faith is the great secret of true perception. Never do we find any opposition in Holy Scripture between faith and understanding, between faith and reason, but only between faith and sight. Faith is the greatest perceptive power in the world. Through faith we *see*. And as we contemplate God's creation in the light of this early chapter as well as in the later chapters of modern science, we come back to the old word which declares that 'Thou hast created all things, and for Thy pleasure they are and were created' (Rev. iv. 11). The Office of Faith.

In the study of this chapter with special reference to modern science the following authorities will be found of service: M'Cosh, *The Religious Aspect*

Gen. i. *of Evolution*; *The Scientific Temper in Religion* (chapter vii.), by Waggett; *The Conflict of Truth*, by F. H. Capron; *The Impregnable Rock of Holy Scripture*, by W. E. Gladstone; article by Sir J. William Dawson, *Expositor*, third series, vol. iii. p. 284.

III

THE FOUNDATIONS OF HUMAN LIFE

Gen. ii.

Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them.

And on the seventh day God ended His work which He had made; and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had made.

And God blessed the seventh day, and sanctified it; because that in it He had rested from all His work which God created and made.

These *are* the generations of the heavens and of the earth when they were created, in the day that the Lord God made the earth and the heavens,

And every plant of the field before it was in the earth, and every herb of the field before it grew: for the Lord God had not caused it to rain upon the earth, and *there was* not a man to till the ground.

But there went up a mist from the earth, and watered the whole face of the ground.

And the Lord God formed man *of* the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.

And the Lord God planted a garden eastward in Eden; and there He put the man whom He had formed.

And out of the ground made the Lord God to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food; the tree of life also in the midst of the garden, and the tree of knowledge of good and evil.

And a river went out of Eden to water the garden: and from thence it was parted, and became into four heads.

The name of the first *is* Pison; that *is* it which compasseth the whole land of Havilah, where *there is* gold.

And the gold of that land *is* good: there *is* bdellium and the onyx stone.

And the name of the second river *is* Gihon: the same *is* it that compasseth the whole land of Ethiopia.

And the name of the third river *is* Hiddekel: that *is* it which goeth toward the east of Assyria. And the fourth river *is* Euphrates.

And the Lord God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it, and to keep it.

And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat;

But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.

And the Lord God said, *It is* not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him.

And out of the ground the Lord God formed every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air, and brought *them* unto Adam, to see what he would call them: and whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that *was* the name thereof.

And Adam gave names to all cattle, and to the fowl of the air, and to every beast of the field: but for Adam there was not found an help meet for him.

And the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept: and He took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead thereof.

And the rib, which the Lord God had taken from man, made He a woman, and brought her unto the man.

And Adam said, This *is* now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.

Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife; and they shall be one flesh.

And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed.

Gen. ii. Human Life.

THE second chapter of Genesis is the natural sequel of the first, and nowhere is the purpose of the book more clearly seen. After the consideration of creation as a whole our attention is concentrated on man—his formation, his relation to God, and his earthly life.

The introductory purpose of chapter i. is thus evident, and we now proceed to that which

is the predominant purpose of the book — the record of human life in relation to God and religion. The thought of creation is now no longer dominant. In the first chapter man comes at the end as the crown of creation; here he comes at the commencement as the starting-point of human history. Gen. ii.

At the same time this chapter is preparatory to the next, for it deals with some of the fundamental facts and experiences of human life which find their expression and development along the lines recorded in later chapters. We are again reminded that Genesis is a book of beginnings, for this chapter is essentially a chapter of 'geneses,' and is best looked at from this point of view, since it deals with some of the primary essentials of human life on earth. It is hardly too much to say that there is a great law connected with the first mention of anything in Scripture which is afterwards treated or recorded in other parts. It will frequently, if not always, be found that 'the very first words on any subject on which the Holy Spirit is going to treat are the keystone of the whole matter' (B. W. Newton. Quoted in *The Bible and Spiritual Criticism*, by Dr Pierson, p. 41). There are several things mentioned for the first time in this chapter, and they deserve the closest possible attention.

I. *The Sabbath for Man* (vers. 1-3).—Strictly, this section should be placed in close connection with chapter i. as the crowning point of the record of the days of creation. As the Sabbath is men- The Sabbath.

Gen. ii. tioned here for the first time we are justified in inquiring as to its fundamental purpose and principles.

The Sabbath should first be considered in its primary meaning. In the light of God's creative work the fundamental and primary idea of the Sabbath is twofold: cessation from work, and satisfaction after work.

The Sabbath should then be noticed as a divine institution. The very familiar term 'sanctify' occurs first here, and we are enabled to see that its root idea is 'separation' or 'consecration.' God separated—*i.e.* set apart—the Sabbath to be consecrated to a special purpose.

The Sabbath should be emphasised as of permanent obligation. The institution of the Sabbath is evidently grounded in creation, and is therefore pre-Mosaic, and not at all to be limited to the Jews. It is noteworthy that the fourth Commandment calls attention to the Sabbath as an already existing fact ('Remember the Sabbath day,' Exod. xx. 8). There are many indications, both in Genesis and in Babylonian records, that the Sabbath was part of the primeval revelation which received fresh sanction under Moses. Only in this way can the universality of the tradition and the precise wording of the fourth Commandment be explained.

The Sabbath should be carefully understood as to its essential elements. God's rest after creation is put forth as the reason and model of man's weekly rest. It involves the special consecration

to God of a portion of our time. While it affords physical rest and recreation of energies, it also calls for the worship of God. Nor are we to lay any stress on the day, since no one can now say for certain that any particular day of the week is, literally, the seventh day from the close of creation. It is the institution, not the day, that must be emphasised. Whether we think of the physical, or the mental, or the spiritual results of the observance of the Sabbath Day, we are face to face with one of the fundamental facts of human life. The law of God and the needs of man combine to make the observance of the Sabbath an absolute necessity. Gen. ii.

II. *The Formation of Man* (vers. 4-7).—At this point a new section of Genesis commences extending to chapter iv. 26, and described as 'these are the generations of the heavens and of the earth.' This phrase, as we have already noticed, is always at the beginning of a section, and has a prospective view, not a retrospective. It is a superscription, not a subscription, and deals with some new unfolding of the record. It suitably describes the section that follows, for it describes the offspring or 'generations' of the heavens and of the earth in the person of man. Man is at once the offspring of earth and heaven. It would be impossible to regard this phrase as suited either to the end of chapter i. or as introductory to it, since that chapter deals with the heavens and the earth themselves, not with their 'generations' or offspring. Man Formed.

It is sometimes urged that this section introduces

Gen. ii.

a new and second account of creation, but this is only true in the sense that we have here a more circumstantial account of what is given in summary form in chapter i. The differences are not contradictory, but complementary, and are explained by the different standpoint. The second account presupposes the first in several particulars. Thus in chapter i. 27, we have both male and female referred to as created (*cf.* chap. v. 1, 2), which prepares the way for the detailed statement of chapter ii. So also the 'herb' of chapter iii. 18 implies chapter i. 29. Chapter ii. says nothing as to the relative priority of man or plants, and only refers to the trees of Eden (vers. 8, 9). Plants and man are necessarily associated here in connection with husbandry and tillage, and the association is one of thought, not of chronology. Man could hardly have been created before there was a home and provision for him (Green, *Unity of the Book of Genesis, in loc.*).

The Divine Names.

The change in the Divine Name ('Lord God' instead of 'God') is also very noteworthy. 'Elohim' is the God of Creation, with special reference to His power and might. 'Jehovah' is the God of Revelation and Redemption, with special reference to human life and the Divine covenant. The combination of the two names ('Lord God,' 'Jehovah Elohim') shows the association of the God of Revelation with the God of Creation, and the discrimination of the usage of these two Divine Names in the whole section (chaps. ii. 4, iv. 26) is very striking and suggestive. So far from this

usage being a proof of different documents, there are, on the contrary, clear indications that they are used with precision and spiritual meaning. Gen. ii.

These verses (4-7) tell us of the special preparation made for man's life, and they describe the appearance of the earth at the time of man's formation.

Man's Physical Creation.

The terms descriptive of man's physical creation need careful attention. The word 'formed' is the Hebrew *Asah,* not *Bara,* and refers to moulding or fashioning out of already existing materials. As these existing materials are described as 'the dust of the ground,' we see at once how true to scientific fact the statement is in man's point of contact with material creation. If, therefore, we are inclined to hold that so far as man's bodily structure is concerned he is a product of evolution, having come upwards from below, we may find in the story in Genesis a possible suggestion of this point.

Man's Spiritual Nature.

Equally clear and definite is the statement as to man's spiritual nature—'breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.' Thus, whatever may be true of man's bodily frame, there was a point of departure from material creation in regard to man's moral being which is characterised in this verse as a Divine act differentiating man from nature. Once again we are in the region of scientific fact, for, in spite of arguments to the contrary, there is—at any rate up to the present—no real proof of the evolution of man's moral and spiritual nature. Personality has never yet been expressed in terms of evolution, and

Gen. ii. requires a Divine creation to account for it. Three great facts stand outside the realm of evolution as it is now understood—human speech, human conscience, and human individuality.

Man's Home. III. *The Home of Man* (vers. 8-14).—Human life requires a locality, a home for its proper expression and development, and consequently we read of God's provision for this great necessity. As is well known, the exact locality of man's first home has been a subject of great discussion, and the result is as uncertain to-day as ever. Three solutions of the problem practically sum up the known conditions—(1) At the head of the Persian Gulf; (2) Armenia; (3) Babylonia. The weightiest authorities seem to favour the last-named locality.

The two elements of man's home call for our attention—the characteristics of beauty ('pleasant to the sight'), and utility ('good for food'). As it was with the first home, so should it ever be, in the possession and proportion of these two requirements. The beautiful without the useful, or the useful without the beautiful, will fail in that which is essential to a true home.

The tree of life and the tree of knowledge of good and evil seem to be symbols of spiritual realities. We may set aside the unworthy and unnecessary literalism which thinks of the fruit of these trees as capable of conveying life and knowledge. They are in keeping with the pictorial and symbolical character of the narrative as expressive of great spiritual realities.

IV. *The Service of Man* (ver. 15).—From the

very first man was intended for work, and the necessity of service is one of the fundamental principles of man's existence. Moreover, this necessity will be realised in enjoyment under normal conditions, for there is nothing which is so full of genuine satisfaction as the performance of the work which God has given us to do. Work which is not toil and trouble always gives pleasure. In the Garden of Eden man was to 'dress it and to keep it.' May not this latter phrase give us some hint of already-existing danger? May not defence as well as preservation be included? If so, man was not only to do the work of the gardener in dressing it, he had also to safeguard it, presumably from foes. Again we seem to be in the realm of spiritual realities in this hint of the existence of evil on the earth.

Gen. ii. Man's Service.

V. *The Probation of Man* (vers. 16, 17).—For the first time we are reminded of the possibility of human understanding, human speech, and human language in this communication from God to man. Man had this primeval revelation from God, giving full permission of freedom in the garden with one simple, but significant, limitation. There was one thing, and one only, that he was not to do. Again we notice the underlying spiritual reality involved. The narrative gives in a pictorial form the concrete fact of human responsibility and probation. Man's life was to be limited by obedience, God's law being the standard of his life. There is nothing unworthy in the form of the probation. The principle of obedience can be emphasised as easily one way as

Man's Probation.

Gen. ii.

another. The result of disobedience is stated to be death, and the precise meaning of this term will come before us later. Suffice it to say, as we have it here for the first time in Scripture, the root idea of death seems to be that of separation, not annihilation.

Man's Authority.

VI. *The Authority of Man* (vers. 18-20).—We are here taught in detail what is mentioned briefly in chapter i. 26—man's original dominion and lordship over nature. In a very true sense God intended man to be the crown of creation, and this naming of the creatures of the earth and sky is the Scripture method of emphasising a fact which all scientific research during the centuries has gone to confirm more and more. Man was intended to be supreme, the culminating point of God's creation. Hints of this are found in various parts of Holy Scripture (*cf.* Ps. viii.), and it is not altogether speculative to attempt to imagine the precise forms that this dominion would have taken had sin not come into the world. In any case that lordship will one day be resumed (Isa. xi. 6; Heb. ii. 6-10).

Man's Companion.

VII. *The Companion for Man* (vers. 21-25).—We are now to read the detail of that creation of the female already barely mentioned in chapter i. 27. The words of verse 18 express a profound truth which can be proved from various points of view. 'It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him.' 'It is not good' whether we consider man's character and its development, or his need of fellowship, or his

position as head of the race. It is curious that from this verse, by an error of reading, the English language has been supplied with the term 'help-meet.' The Hebrew phrase is 'a helper suited for him,' or, quite literally, 'a helper as his counterpart.' This is the true idea of woman's relation to man, his counterpart, his complement, and whenever this is realised in marriage, God's purpose is being fulfilled. Gen. ii.

'For woman is not undevelopt man,
But diverse:

Not like to like, but like in difference.
Yet in the long years liker must they grow;

Till at the last she set herself to man,
Like perfect music unto noble words;

Distinct in individualities,
But like each other ev'n as those who love.'

A Narrative of Facts.

The narrative continues to be pictorial and picturesque, though we must ever take care to avoid the idea that it is purely allegorical. The pictures have distinct realities corresponding to them, and are expressive of actual facts. The question of sex is one of the problems still unsolved (and perhaps insoluble) by the science of to-day, and it may perhaps be asked whether science could ever have given a more religiously fitting and helpful account of the physiological facts as they are now known to us.

Matthew Henry quaintly says that woman was taken out of man's side to suggest her equality with him; not out of his feet to imply inferiority,

Gen. ii. or out of his head to suggest superiority, but out of his side, implying companionship and equality.

Not only the formation of woman, but the great primary ordinance of marriage, is brought before us in this section, and so the chapter ends with this account of one of the essential facts and factors in human life and history.

Once more let us call attention to the real value of this record both as to its pictorial form and the underlying facts suggested and implied. As the Editor of Lange's *Commentary*, referring to these early chapters, says :—

'Great truths, great facts, ineffable truths, ineffable facts, are doubtless set forth. We do not abate one iota of their greatness, their wonderfulness, by supposing such a mode of representation. It is not an accommodation to a rude and early age, but the best language for every age. How trifling the conceit that our science could have furnished any better! . . . Her language will ever be more or less incorrect; and therefore, a Divine revelation cannot use it, since such use would be an endorsement of its absolute verity. The simpler and more universal language of the Scripture may be inadequate, as all language must be; it may fall short; but it points in the right direction. Though giving us only the great steps in the process, it secures that essential faith in the transcendent Divine working, which science—our science, or the science of ages hence—might only be in danger, to say the least, of darkening. It saves us from those trifling things commonly called reconciliations of revelation with science, and which the next science is almost sure to unreconcile. It does so by placing the mind on a wholly different plane, giving us simple, though grand, conceptions as the vehicle of great ideas and great facts of origin in themselves no more accessible to the most cultivated than to the lowliest minds. There is an awful

sublimity in this Mosaic account of the origin of the world and man, and that, too, whether we regard it as inspired Scripture or the grandest picture ever conceived by human genius. To those who cannot, or who do not, thus appreciate it, it matters little what mode of interpretation is adopted —whether it be one of the so-called reconciliations, or the crude dogmatism that calls itself literal because it chooses to take on the narrowest scale a language so suggestive of vast times and ineffable causalities' (p. 211). **Gen. ii.**

Suggestions for Meditation.

We see in this chapter some of the essential elements of human life. They call for earnest thought and definite personal application. They cover almost everything of importance in life and experience, and are a constant reminder of God's purpose for humanity and for each individual.

(1) Man's kinship with God (ver. 7).
(2) Man's worship of God (ver. 3).
(3) Man's fellowship with God (ver. 16).
(4) Man's service for God (ver. 18).
(5) Man's loyalty to God (ver. 17).
(6) Man's authority from God (ver. 19).
(7) Man's social life from and for God (ver. 24).

When these ideas are realised in personal experience, God's purpose in creating man and man's perfect life are being fulfilled.

IV

THE FALL

Gen. iii.

Now the serpent was more subtil than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?

And the woman said unto the serpent, We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden:

But of the fruit of the tree which *is* in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die.

And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die:

For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil.

And when the woman saw that the tree *was* good for food, and that it *was* pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make *one* wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat.

And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they *were* naked; and they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves aprons.

And they heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day: and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God amongst the trees of the garden.

And the Lord God called unto Adam, and said unto him, Where *art* thou?

And he said, I heard Thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I *was* naked; and I hid myself.

And He said, Who told thee that thou *wast* naked? Hast thou eaten of the tree, whereof I commanded thee that thou shouldest not eat?

And the man said, The woman whom Thou gavest *to be* with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat.

The Fall

And the Lord God said unto the woman, What *is* this *that* thou hast done? And the woman said, The serpent beguiled me, and I did eat.

And the Lord God said unto the serpent, Because thou hast done this, thou *art* cursed above all cattle, and above every beast of the field, upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life:

And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.

Unto the woman he said, I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire *shall be* to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee.

And unto Adam he said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed *is* the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat *of* it all the days of thy life;

Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat of the herb of the field;

In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou *art*, and unto dust shalt thou return.

And Adam called his wife's name Eve; because she was the mother of all living.

Unto Adam also and to his wife did the Lord God make coats of skins, and clothed them.

And the Lord God said, Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil: and now, lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever:

Therefore the Lord God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from whence he was taken.

So He drove out the man; and He placed at the east of the garden of Eden cherubim, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life.

IT is hardly too much to say that this chapter is the pivot of the Bible, for if we take it away the rest of Scripture becomes meaningless. With the exception of the fact of Creation, we have here the record of the most important and far-reaching event in the world's history—the entrance of sin. Gen. iii.

The record in this chapter, like that of the

Gen. iii.

Creation, is variously interpreted. Many speak of it as 'mythical,' by which is often meant that which is unreal, untrue, and impossible. Others use the term 'myth' as indicating an elementary method of conveying moral and spiritual truth, even though the narrative itself is not historical in form. The former view is naturally to be set aside by all who believe in the fact and veracity of a Divine revelation. The latter interpretation of 'myth' does not seem to be quite satisfactory on any intelligible principle of Divine inspiration. The truest method of interpretation is that which regards these narratives as pictorial records of actual fact; solid history in pictorial form. It is inadequate to speak of the narrative as poetic or merely symbolical, lest we should give the impression that the story is not concerned with actual fact. Allegory, too, is identical with the truth illustrated, and does not necessarily presuppose any historical basis. What we must insist upon and ever keep in view is that, whether allegorical or pictorial, the narrative is expressive of actual fact.

The chapter is so full of spiritual truths that it is impossible to deal with everything in detail. It must suffice to call attention to four great realities of the spiritual life which are here brought before us for the first time in the Word of God.

Temptation. —Its Source.

I. *Temptation.* — Consider its source. The practical character of the narrative is clearly seen in the reference to the serpent as the immediate cause of human sin. Inasmuch as Satan is not actually mentioned in the chapter, we are surely

right in regarding this reference to the serpent as a pictorial and symbolical reference to Satan himself, a view which is confirmed by later passages of Scripture, such as 2 Cor. xi. 14; Rev. xii. 9. and xx. 2. There is no reference to the problem of how and when Satan sinned. The one point of stress is laid upon sin in relation to man, and we are taught very unmistakably two great truths: (1) That God is not the author of sin, and (2) that sin came to man from without, and was due to a power of evil suggestion and influence other than that which came from man's own nature. Even though we fall short of identifying the serpent of this chapter with the personal Satan of later Scripture, we may still regard the teaching of the Fall story as suggesting the personification of an evil principle from without, which in later times is seen to be more than a personification, and nothing less than an actual being (Orr, *Image of God in Man*, pp. 219 ff.). Gen. iii.

Mark its subtilty. The stages of the temptation should be carefully noticed: (*a*) The serpent first of all excites the woman's curiosity by speaking to her; (*b*) then he raises a suspicion of God by the question that he puts to her (ver. 1); (*c*) then he proceeds to inject a threefold doubt of God—of His *goodness*, by reason of the restriction (ver. 1); of His *righteousness*, in the assurance that they shall not die (ver. 4); and of His *holiness*, in the assurance that, so far from dying, they 'shall be as gods' (ver. 5). (See Candlish's *Lectures on Genesis*, *in loc.*) (*d*) Thus he incites the woman to unbelief, —Its Subtilty.

Gen. iii. and (*e*) leads her eventually to disobedience. It is very noteworthy that the temptation is associated entirely with doubt of God's Word: 'Hath God said?' This is characteristic of sin at all times; the doubt, the denial, and the disbelief of God's Word. First Satan *distorts* the Word, then he leads the woman to *doubt* it, and last of all he *denies* it. It is also significant that Satan and the woman in their conversation use the term 'God,' and not 'Lord God.' This inadequate and defective reference to God was doubtless part of the explanation of the temptation and the Fall. It would not have served Satan's purposes to have introduced the specific covenant term 'Jehovah' when raising questions about the veracity and faithfulness of God's Word.

—Its Success. Observe its success. The stages of the woman's attitude have often been pointed out: (*a*) She heeded the temptation, and listened to Satan's questioning of God's Word and his new interpretation of that Divine utterance. In her reply to his question, she perverted and misquoted *three times* the divine law to which she and Adam were subject: (1) She disparaged her privileges by misquoting the terms of the Divine *permission* as to the other trees. (2) She overstated the restrictions by misquoting the Divine *prohibition*. (3) She underrated her obligations by misquoting the Divine *penalty*. And thus she was easily exposed to the temptation to question, doubt, and deny God. (*b*) Her curiosity was roused, perhaps, by Satan demonstrating before her the apparent futility of heeding

God, for we are told that she *saw* that the tree was *good* for *food* as well as pleasant to the eyes. (*c*) Then sprang up physical craving, and she desired to disobey, with the result that (*d*) she took and ate, and 'gave also unto her husband and he did eat.' Her fall was consequently due to dalliance with temptation. She did not repel, but yielded to it. Had she resisted at the very outset she would not have fallen; for it is a universal law that if we resist the devil, he will flee from us. Nothing is more remarkable in the whole history of man's moral life than the powerlessness of the devil to overcome us apart from our own assent and consent. If we resist, he flees; if we yield, he wins. It is this simple fact that constitutes man's ultimate responsibility for his actions. He never can say, 'I was overpowered in spite of myself.' All that he can say is, 'I was overpowered because of myself.' Gen. iii.

II. Sin.—The reality of sin is undoubted. The chapter is clear as to the fact of a Fall. There is such a thing as moral evil in the world. Human nature, with its constant tendency to retrogression and degeneration, clearly proves this. However and whenever it has come about, we know the universality and persistence of evil to-day, and the world has never had any other adequate explanation than that which is afforded by this chapter. Traditions of the Fall are almost as numerous as those of creation (*Pulpit Commentary*, p. 59). There is scarcely any part of God's Word which is more in accord with the known facts of history and science than the story of this chapter. We have recently Sin—Its Reality.

Gen. iii.

been told that the doctrine of a Fall from original righteousness is only found in this chapter and in the theology of St Paul, and yet it is surely obvious that the facts of sin and its universality are presupposed in every part of the Old Testament.

'If a Fall were not narrated in the opening chapters of Genesis, we should still have to postulate something of the kind for the Bible's own representations of the state of man' (Orr, *ut supra*, p. 201).

We may also add that the same postulate is necessary to account for the tendencies to evil seen in the natures of little children throughout the whole world.

—Its Root.

The root of sin should be understood. The foundation of all sin lies in man's desire for self-assertion and his determination to be independent of God. Adam and Eve chafed under the restriction laid upon them by the command of God, and it was in opposition to this that they asserted themselves, and thereby fell. Man does not like to be dependent upon another, and subject to commands from without. He desires to go his own way, to be his own master; and as a consequence he sins, and becomes 'lord of himself, that heritage of woe.'

—Its Responsibility.

The responsibility of sin needs constant emphasis. The possibility of sin is involved in the fact of personality. Unless man was to be an automaton, with no opportunity for character, there must be granted the possibility of sin. It is at this point we realise the solemn fact of personal accountability. Whatever may

be true of environment and heredity, they never Gen. iii.
can blot out the distinction between right and wrong, or rob man of his responsibility. Nor must we for a moment suppose that sin was any inherent tendency or primal necessity of human life. Adam had liability, but not a tendency, to sin. Our Lord had neither liability nor tendency, though of course His temptation was real, all the more so because of His sinless nature (Heb. iv. 15 R.V., not A.V.). We to-day, as fallen, have both liability and tendency. Any modern theories of evolution which make sin a necessity of human development tend thereby to blot out the eternal distinction between good and evil. In view of certain aspects of modern evolutionary thought, man had no alternative but to fall; and to add to the confusion of thought and morals, we are also told that this failure was not a fall, but a rise—a fall upwards—so that we must now, it is said, speak of the ascent, not of the fall, of man. In opposition to all this the Bible teaches us that sin was not a necessity, and there never will be any clear Christian thinking until this necessitarian theory is entirely banished from our minds (Orr, *ut supra*, pp. 158 and 298).

III. *Punishment.*—'Be sure your sin will find Punishment.
you out' is the great principle written clearly and deeply on this record of the first sin, as, indeed, of every other since that time. What was the punishment associated with the sin of Adam and Eve? The narrative shows this plainly.

They soon had a sense of guilt. At once their

Gen. iii. Guilt.

eyes were opened, and they became conscious of the shame associated with their wrong-doing. The reference to nakedness and clothing indicates the profound shame that actuated them, and at once they hid themselves from the presence of the Lord. Fear was the result of their guilt; the old experiences of innocence and fellowship were at an end, and now they were guilty before God. Conscience, that element of the Divine image and likeness, was already at work, and their sin was indeed finding them out.

Condemnation.

Then followed a sentence of condemnation. God soon dealt with this wrong-doing, and there was a threefold condemnation. All subterfuges (ver. 10) and all cowardly attempts to blame others (vers. 12, 13) were unavailing, and man stood face to face with the holy God, conscious of guilt and unspeakable shame. (*a*) The serpent was first dealt with, and judgment passed upon him (vers. 14, 15); (*b*) the woman was next judged, and condemned to sorrow and subjection (ver. 16); (*c*) the man last of all was dealt with, and sorrow, hardship, toil, and death were made his portion (vers. 17-19).

Separation.

Last of all came an act of separation. It was impossible for man to remain in the garden, and in a state of fellowship with God. Sin and Paradise were incompatible, and so the Lord sent them forth, driving them out, and placing the guard with the sword that turned every way. Mark the significance of this phrase. There was no possibility of a return to the old life. Paradise was lost, and

by no human effort could it ever be regained. Separation is always the result of sin. 'Your iniquities have separated between you and your God' (Isa. lix. 2). And thus the threefold punishment of guilt, condemnation, and separation accrued to man because of his sin. Gen. iii.

The chapter, however, does not end with sin and its punishment, and we pass on to consider the fourth great reality.

IV. *Redemption.*—The announcement of enmity between the serpent and the woman, and between her seed and his seed, is the first message of Divine redemption in its antagonism to, and victory over, sin. This is indeed the *Protevangelium,* and is the primeval promise which is taken up again and again henceforward in Scripture, until He comes Who destroys him that has the power of death, and casts him into the lake of fire. Redemption. —Promised.

Redemption is not only promised in word, it is also pictured in deed. Man attempted to cover his shame by the leaves of the fig-tree, but this was far too slight a covering for so deep a shame. No human covering could suffice, and so we are told with profound significance that the 'Lord God made coats of skins and clothed them.' This Divine clothing took the place of their own self-made clothing, and now they are clothed indeed. The mention of skins suggests the fact and necessity of death of the animal before they could be used as clothing, and it is more than probable that in this fact we have the primal revelation of sacrifice, and of the way in which —Pictured.

Gen. iii. the robe of righteousness was to be provided for them.

'Jesu, Thy blood and righteousness
My beauty are, my glorious dress.'

—Provided. Looking on to the New Testament, we cannot but associate with this chapter the great Pauline chapter, Romans viii., which ends very significantly with three questions triumphantly asked by the Apostle, and it should be carefully noticed that these questions exactly correspond to the three aspects of punishment mentioned above.

(*a*) 'Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect?' (ver. 33). That is, 'There is no *guilt*.'

(*b*) 'Who is he that condemneth?' (ver. 34). That is, 'There is no *condemnation*.'

(*c*) 'Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?' (ver. 35). That is, 'There is no *separation*.'

Thus, where sin abounded grace did superabound, and 'as by one man sin entered into the world and death by sin, so now grace reigns through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord.'

Suggestions for Meditation. *God's question to Adam* still sounds in the ear of every sinner, 'Where art thou?' It is the call of Divine *justice*, which cannot overlook sin. It is the call of Divine *sorrow*, which grieves over the sinner. It is the call of Divine *love*, which offers redemption for sin. To each and to every one of us the call is reiterated, 'Where art *thou*?'

The answer to the question must be either: 'in Adam' or 'in Christ.' These are the only two places where we can be. If we are still 'in Adam,' we are still in sin, and therefore in guilt, condemnation, and in danger of eternal separation. If we are 'in Christ,' we are already pardoned, accounted righteous, subjects of His grace, and heirs of eternal glory. Gen. iii.

Note.—For all modern evolutionary and philosophical questions connected with this chapter attention is earnestly called to the very able and scholarly book by Dr Orr, already quoted and referred to.

V

CAIN AND ABEL

Gen. iv. 1-15

And Adam knew Eve his wife; and she conceived, and bare Cain, and said, I have gotten a man from the Lord.

And she again bare his brother Abel. And Abel was a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground.

And in process of time it came to pass, that Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the Lord.

And Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock, and of the fat thereof. And the Lord had respect unto Abel, and to his offering:

But unto Cain, and to his offering, He had not respect. And Cain was very wroth, and his countenance fell.

And the Lord said unto Cain, Why art thou wroth? and why is thy countenance fallen?

If thou doest well, shalt thou not be accepted? and if thou doest not well, sin lieth at the door. And unto thee *shall be* his desire, and thou shalt rule over him.

And Cain talked with Abel his brother: and it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother, and slew him.

And the Lord said unto Cain, Where *is* Abel thy brother? And he said, I know not: *Am* I my brother's keeper?

And He said, What hast thou done? the voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto Me from the ground.

And now *art* thou cursed from the earth, which hath opened her mouth to receive thy brother's blood from thy hand.

When thou tillest the ground, it shall not henceforth yield unto thee her strength: a fugitive and a vagabond shalt thou be in the earth.

And Cain said unto the Lord, My punishment *is* greater than I can bear.

Behold, Thou hast driven me out this day from the face of the earth; and from Thy face shall I be hid; and I shall be a

fugitive and a vagabond in the earth; and it shall come to pass, *that* every one that findeth me shall slay me.

And the Lord said unto him, Therefore whosoever slayeth Cain, vengeance shall be taken on him sevenfold. And the Lord set a mark upon Cain, lest any finding him should kill him.

Gen. iv. 1-15. The Progress of Sin.

FROM the origin of sin (chap. iii.) we pass to the consideration of its progress. Sin in the individual is now seen to develop and express itself in the family. This chapter, like the three preceding it, is full of 'geneses,' for we have brought before us the first motherhood, the first birth, the first family, the first murder, the first martyrdom, the first indications of human development. Not least of all we have in it the record of the first conflict between the two seeds (chap. iii. 15), and this in connection with religious worship.

Selection of Facts.

It is a necessary and useful reminder that only a few things are touched upon in this chapter, and that many things are left unexplained. The writer calls attention to the mountain peaks only of human history and experience as he passes from one fact to another. Thus there is no statement of the time that elapsed between chapter iii. 24 and chapter iv. 3; no explanation of the origin of sacrifice, of blood revenge (ver. 14), of the method of Divine acceptance of sacrifice, of the sign appointed for Cain, and of the growth of the population implied (vers. 15-19). Whatever views we may hold upon these subjects must necessarily be problematical in the absence of clear teaching. Turning now to the record of the two

Gen. iv. 1-15.

brothers and all that the story implies, we notice:—

The Home.

I. *The First Home.*—We have here brought before us those home relationships, conjugal, parental, brotherly, that constitute the foundation of all social life. The parents, although expelled from Eden, are evidently still influenced by the consciousness of their relation to God, and by the thought of a Divine promise of a seed (chap. iii. 15). The words of Eve at the birth of her first-born son are to be noted. She called the child 'Cain'—*i.e.* 'possession'—evidently thinking that in him would be fulfilled the promise to her seed. It is possible that the literal rendering of her words, 'I have gotten a man, even Jehovah,' suggests a more definite belief and knowledge than are warranted. At the same time, to render the words, 'I have gotten a man with the help of the Lord,' seems unduly to weaken the Hebrew phrase. Probably we are to understand some such rendering as 'I have gotten a man in relation to Jehovah,' pointing definitely to a conviction that somehow or other this new-born son was related to the Divine promise and purpose. Eve must have been quickly undeceived in this respect, for when her second child was born there was no reference whatever to any relation to the Lord, and the fact of his name meaning 'vanity' seems to show clearly that the mother had already become disappointed in her hopes of her first-born son.

The Brothers.

II. *The Two Brothers.*—Their work is first of all brought before us—the one being a shepherd, the

other an agriculturist. Thus early in the history of the world are we reminded of the necessity and dignity of work as one of the essentials of human life and progress. Gen. iv. 1-15.

They not only worked, however, but they also worshipped. 'To labour' is *not* 'to pray' in the literal meaning of the phrase. Man must pray as well as labour. Their worship took the form of offerings, and this must always be the case. Worship is giving, not getting; ascribing, not appropriating. It is evident from the phrase, 'in process of time,' that this worship was regularly rendered as something habitual in their life. Man is never more truly man than when he is worshipping God; for it is only then that he finds, realises, and expresses his true relationship of dependence. The Offering.

III. *The Divine Response.*—One offering was accepted, the other was not. It is noteworthy that the Divine 'respect' is stated in both cases, not merely with reference to the offerings, but primarily with reference to the offerer. 'Unto Abel and to his offering; unto Cain and to his offering.' The value of the offering is seen to depend upon the character of the offerer. Not costliness, but character, constitutes true worship. We naturally ask why it was that God had respect to Abel and to his offering, and not to Cain and his? According to Heb. xi. 4, the explanation is to be found in the words, 'By faith Abel offered a more excellent sacrifice than Cain.' Faith always presupposes a Divine revelation to which it is the response, and in the light of the New Testament The Divine Response.

Gen. iv. 1-15.

interpretation it would seem clear that one was an offering of faith, and the other an offering without faith. Why should faith be emphasised by the Epistle to the Hebrews more than gratitude or prayer? May it not be because of a prior revelation from God as to how He was to be approached? We must never forget that while death is very familiar to us now, it was not so in those early days, and it might well have been asked why it was necessary to destroy the life of a lamb when it was not needed for food. In what respects are we to think of death as making a sacrifice acceptable to the Creator? Is it not possible, and even probable, that Abel's sacrifice, involving death, was his response to an already existing revelation of God as to this method of sacrifice? May we not see in the coats of skins (chap. iii. 21) a hint of the revelation of sacrifice through death as the way of approach to God? This view at any rate makes it intelligible why Abel can be said to have offered 'by faith,' while Cain offered a sacrifice which did not involve death, and which was therefore, on this interpretation, not in accordance with the Divine revelation. At any rate we may fairly say that these two aspects represent two attitudes to-day—the attitude of the man who responds to God's revelation and submits to His will, and the attitude of the man who will only come to God on his own terms, refusing to do what does not suit him or commend itself to his judgment. It does not seem unjust to Cain to say that his was a sacrifice which, however good in itself, was not

prompted by a faith that rested in and responded to God's revelation of His will. In this connection the works of Professor Curtiss (*Primitive Semitic Sacrifices*, and *Expositor*, 1904, 1905) on the primitive Semitic ideas of sacrifice should be carefully studied, since they indicate very clearly that the root idea of sacrifice among the Bedouin tribes is propitiation rather than communion. Gen. iv. 1-15.

IV. *The Divine Expostulation.*—Cain's anger clearly shows that his worship was only a form of godliness without the power. If his offering had been made in the right spirit, there would have been no anger and no lowering of the countenance. The Lord meets this wrath with a very definite inquiry and an equally definite reminder. Verse 7 has long been a *crux interpretum*. The following rendering seems worthy of attention: 'If thou doest well, will there not be acceptance for thee? And if thou doest not well, sin is lying at the door like a crouching beast, ready to spring upon thee, and unto thee is sin's desire, but thou shouldest rule over it.' (See R.V. margin.) It is very evident from these words that Cain had not been 'doing well' previously to this, and hence the necessity of this solemn warning of the bitter consequences of continued sin. Sin is personified as a lurking beast of prey ready to spring upon its victim, and against this enemy Cain is warned, and commanded to rule over it. (See Murphy, Conant, and Lange *in loc.*) For another view see Note, p. 64. Divine Expostulation.

V. *The First Murder.* — The warning went unheeded, and the jealousy and hatred found The First Murder.

Gen. iv. 1-15.

expression in anger and murder. Thus, in connection with religious worship, the first murder was committed. Could anything be more tragic?

'If you want to find out Cain's condition of heart you will find it after the service which he pretended to render; you know a man best *out* of church; the minister sees the best side of a man, the lawyer the worst, and the physician the real. If you want to know what a man's religious worship is worth, see him *out* of church. Cain killed his brother when church was over, and that is the exact measure of Cain's piety. And so, when you went home the other day, you charged five shillings for a three-shilling article, and told the buyer it was too cheap: and that is exactly the value of your psalm-singing and sermon-hearing. You said you enjoyed the discourse exceedingly last Thursday; then you filled up the income-tax paper falsely; and you will be judged by the schedule, not by the sentiment' (Parker's *People's Bible*, Genesis, p. 147).

Condemnation.

VI. *The Divine Condemnation.* — Very soon comes God's inquiry, 'Where is Abel thy brother?' for sin cannot possibly be hid. There is a solemn significance in the repetition of 'his brother' and 'thy brother' in these verses. The Divine rebuke immediately follows (ver. 10), which in turn is succeeded by the Divine sentence of unrequited toil and wandering. Thus once again we are taught in most unmistakable terms of the Divine holiness and righteousness, which will not for an instant tolerate human sin.

Judgment.

VII. *The Divine Judgment.*—Cain now realises something of what he has done, though it would seem that his thought is more of his punishment than of the sin that led to it. In mitigation of the

results of his sin the Lord gives him a pledge of protection from vengeance. The phrase 'set a mark upon Cain' should be rendered 'appointed a sign for Cain,' the same word being used as in chapter i. 14, ix. 12, and elsewhere. There seems no reason to think of a mark or brand upon his body, but some pledge or sign in regard to the question of vengeance. Then the judgment was executed, and Cain 'went out from the presence of the Lord,' realising now to the full the separating character of sin, and the fact that when a man does despite to the Spirit of grace in rejecting God's will there can be only spiritual solitariness and misery.

Gen. iv. 1-15.

Suggestions for Meditation.

The two men, Cain and Abel, are brought before us in several passages in the New Testament. They were both worshippers, for Cain was not a profane man; and yet how different was their worship, by reason of the difference of their lives! Two New Testament phrases sum up the practical lessons:—

1. 'Righteous Abel.' Abel teaches us very clearly that—

(1) God is to be worshipped.

(2) God is to be worshipped through sacrifice.

(3) God is to be worshipped through atoning sacrifice.

(4) God is to be worshipped through an atoning sacrifice responded to by faith.

(5) God is to be glorified by a life of faith.

(6) God is to be glorified by a life of faith which

Gen. iv. 1-15.

expresses itself in righteousness. (*Cf.* 1 John iii. 12; Heb. xi. 4, xii. 24.)

2. 'The way of Cain.' In the life of Cain we see

(1) Human thought as opposed to Divine revelation.

(2) Human wilfulness as opposed to the Divine will.

(3) Human pride as opposed to Divine humility.

(4) Human hatred as opposed to Divine love.

(5) Human hostility as opposed to Divine favour.

(6) Human loneliness as opposed to Divine fellowship.

Note on Verse 7.

Another interpretation which has much to recommend it is: 'But if thou doest (or offerest) not well, even then there is a sin-offering ready at hand for use as a propitiation. And not only so, but Abel, thy brother, will submit himself to thee as the first-born, and thou shalt exercise thy right of authority over him' (*cf.* iii. 16). The word rendered 'sin' is translated 'sin-offering' a large number of times in the Old Testament. This view regards the verse as at once a divine expostulation and an offer of grace. It is further argued that as the word for 'sin' in the Hebrew is feminine, and the verb and pronouns in the last clause are masculine, the 'desire' must refer to Abel and not to sin.

VI

HUMAN PROGRESS

Gen. iv. 16—vi. 8

And Cain went out from the presence of the Lord, and dwelt in the land of Nod, on the east of Eden.

And Cain knew his wife; and she conceived, and bare Enoch: and he builded a city, and called the name of the city, after the name of his son, Enoch.

And unto Enoch was born Irad: and Irad begat Mehujael: and Mehujael begat Methusael: and Methusael begat Lamech.

And Lamech took unto him two wives: the name of the one *was* Adah, and the name of the other Zillah.

And Adah bare Jabal: he was the father of such as dwell in tents, and *of such as have* cattle.

And his brother's name *was* Jubal: he was the father of all such as handle the harp and organ.

And Zillah, she also bare Tubal-cain, an instructer of every artificer in brass and iron; and the sister of Tubal-cain *was* Naamah.

And Lamech said unto his wives, Adah and Zillah, hear my voice; ye wives of Lamech, hearken unto my speech: for I have slain a man to my wounding, and a young man to my hurt:

If Cain shall be avenged sevenfold, truly Lamech seventy and sevenfold.

And Adam knew his wife again; and she bare a son, and called his name Seth: For God, *said she*, hath appointed me another seed instead of Abel, whom Cain slew.

And to Seth, to him also there was born a son; and he called his name Enos: then began men to call upon the name of the Lord.

This *is* the book of the generations of Adam. In the day that God created man, in the likeness of God made He him;

Male and female created He them; and blessed them, and called their name Adam, in the day when they were created.

And Adam lived an hundred and thirty years, and begat *a son* in his own likeness, after his image; and called his name Seth:

And the days of Adam after he had begotten Seth were eight hundred years: and he begat sons and daughters:

And all the days that Adam lived were nine hundred and thirty years: and he died.

And Seth lived an hundred and five years, and begat Enos:

And Seth lived after he begat Enos eight hundred and seven years, and begat sons and daughters:

And all the days of Seth were nine hundred and twelve years: and he died.

And Enos lived ninety years, and begat Cainan:

And Enos lived after he begat Cainan eight hundred and fifteen years, and begat sons and daughters:

And all the days of Enos were nine hundred and five years: and he died.

And Cainan lived seventy years, and begat Mahalaleel:

And Cainan lived after he begat Mahalaleel eight hundred and forty years, and begat sons and daughters:

And all the days of Cainan were nine hundred and ten years: and he died.

And Mahalaleel lived sixty and five years, and begat Jared:

And Mahalaleel lived after he begat Jared eight hundred and thirty years, and begat sons and daughters:

And all the days of Mahalaleel were eight hundred ninety and five years: and he died.

And Jared lived an hundred sixty and two years, and he begat Enoch:

And Jared lived after he begat Enoch eight hundred years, and begat sons and daughters:

And all the days of Jared were nine hundred sixty and two years: and he died.

And Enoch lived sixty and five years, and begat Methuselah:

And Enoch walked with God after he begat Methuselah three hundred years, and begat sons and daughters:

And all the days of Enoch were three hundred sixty and five years:

And Enoch walked with God: and he *was* not; for God took him.

And Methuselah lived an hundred eighty and seven years, and begat Lamech:

And Methuselah lived after he begat Lamech seven hundred eighty and two years, and begat sons and daughters:

And all the days of Methuselah were nine hundred sixty and nine years: and he died.

And Lamech lived an hundred eighty and two years, and begat a son:

And he called his name Noah, saying, This *same* shall comfort us concerning our work and toil of our hands, because of the ground which the Lord hath cursed.

And Lamech lived after he begat Noah five hundred ninety and five years, and begat sons and daughters:

And all the days of Lamech were seven hundred seventy and seven years: and he died.

And Noah was five hundred years old: and Noah begat Shem, Ham, and Japheth.

And it came to pass, when men began to multiply on the face of the earth, and daughters were born unto them,

That the sons of God saw the daughters of men that they *were* fair; and they took them wives of all which they chose.

And the Lord said, My Spirit shall not always strive with man, for that he also *is* flesh: yet his days shall be an hundred and twenty years.

There were giants in the earth in those days; and also after that, when the sons of God came in unto the daughters of men, and they bare *children* to them, the same *became* mighty men which *were* of old, men of renown.

And God saw that the wickedness of man *was* great in the earth, and *that* every imagination of the thoughts of his heart *was* only evil continually.

And it repented the Lord that He had made man on the earth, and it grieved Him at His heart.

And the Lord said, I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth; both man, and beast, and the creeping thing, and the fowls of the air; for it repenteth me that I have made them.

But Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord.

WE have now to follow the development of humanity along two lines—that of Cain and that of Seth. This progress is first seen in the family, and then it extends to society in general. The entire section now before us has a completeness all its own, even though it forms parts of two of the original sections of Genesis. Thus (*a*) iv. 16-24 gives the line of Cain; (*b*) iv. 25 to v. 32 the line of Seth; and then (*c*) vi. 1-8 the blending of these two lines, culminating in the Flood on the one hand and the preservation of Noah on the other. The entire section thus calls for careful study, both in connection with what precedes and with what

Gen. iv. 16 —vi. 8.

Gen. iv. 16 —vi. 8. follows. 'The section chapter ii. 4 to chapter iv. had recorded a constant descent from bad to worse —the sin of our first parents, their expulsion from Paradise, the murder of Abel, Cain's descendants reaching in Lamech the climax of boastful and unrestrained violence. That the section might not be suffered to end in unrelieved gloom a brighter outlook is added at the close, precisely as is done at the end of the next section in vi. 8. Seth is substituted for Abel, whom Cain slew; and instead of piety perishing with murdered Abel, it reaches a new development in the days of Enos. The whole arrangement bears evidence of adaptation and careful thought, and is suggestive of one author, not the combination of separate compositions prepared with no reference to each other' (Green, *The Unity of the Book of Genesis*, p. 48).

I. The First Stream—Irreligion (iv. 16-24).

The characteristics of Cain and his line must be carefully followed.

—In Cain Himself.

I. *The First Stream—Irreligion* (iv. 16-24).—Cain went forth from the immediate neighbourhood of Eden and dwelt 'in the land of Nod.' The precise locality is, of course, unknown, though it is probable that it was the country of Elam. As to the perennial question of Cain's wife, it is sufficient to say that she was either his sister or some other relative. In the absence of any law there would, of course, have been no sin in the marriage of a sister, and it is worthy of mention that within historic times the marriage of brother and sister was in practice in the royal family of Egypt, in order to secure unquestioned royalty of blood in

the descent; and this was the case when the civilisation of Egypt was at its highest. The suggestions of the narrative with regard to Cain show no trace of the influence of God's mercy upon him, and no indication of penitence on his part. He is still godless and reckless. His sacrifice showed that while he was prepared to recognise God as the God of providence, he had no conception of Him as the God of grace. There was no trace of real homage of heart; and as there had been no thought of sin and salvation in his offering, so now there is no indication of real devotion to God. Gen. iv. 16 —vi. 18.

One characteristic of the line of Cain was the settled life they lived. The birth of a son was followed by the building of a city, to which Cain gave the name of his son, Enoch. This indication of a settled abode and a new line of descent seems to show that Cain was now going his own way, regardless of everything else. Nothing more is said of his line until the fifth generation.

It was in the line of Cain that the terrible evil of polygamy was first experienced, and the way that it is mentioned in the narrative by contrast with chapter ii. 24 shows the impression that it was intended to convey. —In the Line of Cain.

From the sons of Lamech come the founders of agriculture (ver. 20), music (ver. 21), and manufacture (ver. 22). This development of earthly civilisation in connection with Cain's line is very suggestive and significant.

In Lamech we have the culmination of Cainite

Gen. iv. 16 —vi. 8.

irreligion. Whatever his song may mean, it seems on the face of it to suggest the glorification of two great evils—polygamy and murder. If heredity accounts for anything, we may see in Lamech the intensified form of those evil tendencies which were evident in Cain.

Thus we have the Cainite race in six generations, and with an entire absence of all indications of religion, unless we interpret the name of Cain's son to mean 'Consecrated.' This line was devoted to things earthly and lived absolutely apart from God. Natural ingenuity characterised the race. There was art and civilisation, but no religion. Not that they were all necessarily flagrantly sinful, but just living without God (Eph. ii. 12). Is it not suggestive that the first time art, trade, and manufactures are mentioned they are associated with godlessness? Is it, or is it not, an accident that art has often flourished most when religion has been at its lowest? Is it not a fact that there is that in music, art, and civilisation which easily panders to the very lowest in man? And while these things should be, and can be, devoted to the highest interests of human life and the glory of God, the possibilities of evil which they contain must never be overlooked. As for regarding them as substitutes for God, this is utterly impossible. This vivid picture of human society without God should be carefully pondered, and the message for society to-day clearly understood and proclaimed.

II. *The Second Stream—Godliness* (iv. 25–v. 32).

—By contrast with the line of Cain we are now introduced to the new line of Seth, his brother. The points of contrast are many and significant. Gen. iv. 16 —vi. 8.

II. The Second Stream—Godliness (iv. 25—v. 32).

The first is the birth of Seth. The death of Abel had left an indelible mark on the soul of Eve, and now with the birth of her third son her hopes of the fulfilment of the primeval promise again spring up, and she calls him Seth, and recognises in his birth a Divine appointment and providence. It is noteworthy that when Cain was born she associated his birth with the Covenant God of Grace (Jehovah). With Seth's birth she associates the God of Creation and Power (Elohim). This distinctness of usage of the Divine names should be carefully noted at each stage of the narrative, for it is full of spiritual significance and cannot be satisfactorily accounted for in any other way. Seth.

Another point of emphasis is associated with the son of Seth. It is interesting that in the same chapter we have the record of the birth of Cain's son and also the son of Seth. Still more interesting is the fact that with the birth of Seth's son there came what may very fairly be called a revival of true religion, for 'then began men to call upon the Name of Jehovah.' This may mean, as in our A.V., a revival of prayer; or it may mean still more than this (see margin), and indicate consecration to Jehovah, 'calling themselves by His Name,' and thereby separating themselves from all those who were not prepared to take the same action. They realised that they were in covenant The Son of Seth.

Gen. iv. 16 —vi. 8.

with the God of their father, Who had promised victory over sin.

The Line of Seth.

Then follows the record of the line of Seth. Once again we have a reference to Adam which comes in naturally at the head of the line of Seth. Ten generations are given, and the monotony of the chapter has often been remarked. It is a simple record of living and dying, only broken by the references to Enoch and Noah. We know nothing more of the names here mentioned—a reminder, however, that human history is not necessarily to be judged by the outstanding names that every one knows:

> 'The best part of human history is never written at all. Family life, patient service, quiet endurance, the training of children, the resistance of temptation; these things are never mentioned by the historian' (Parker, *People's Bible, Genesis*, p. 155).

The three breaks in the whole narrative from Seth are associated with Enos, Enoch, and Noah, and they seem to represent three typical aspects of religious life. (1) Separation (iv. 26, margin); (2) fellowship (v. 22); (3) service (v. 29). No inventions, art, or civilisation are connected with the line of Seth. There is a simplicity about the record, perhaps indicative of the quiet, simple religion that characterised most, if not all, of them.

The Witness of Enoch.

The witness of Enoch is given to us as an oasis in the chapter, and he is one of only two men of whom it is recorded in the Old Testament that they 'walked with God' (vi. 9).

(*a*) The fact of fellowship with God is suggested by this phrase. Several aspects of our 'walk' are emphasised in Scripture. 'Walk before Me' (Gen. xvii. 1), implying sincerity; 'Walk after the Lord your God' (Deut. xiii. 4), suggesting obedience; 'Walk in Him' (Col. ii. 6), telling of union; 'Walking with God,' meaning fellowship. This is life's ideal and the culmination of God's purpose for man. Gen. iv. 16 —vi. 8.

(*b*) The commencement of this fellowship is suggested (ver. 22). Enoch is not said to have walked with God until the birth of his son. May it not have been the coming into his life of that little life, God's gift to him, that led to this close fellowship?

(*c*) The continuance of fellowship. It lasted three hundred years. This was not easy. Enoch was no dreamy sentimental idealist. His life had in it the real difficulty of testimony against evil (Jude 14, 15). The judgment on the line of the Cainites had to be proclaimed, and this is never anything but an irksome and trying task. Like the rest of mankind in later days, Enoch did not find it easy to walk with God.

(*d*) The culmination of fellowship. 'He was not, for God took him.' The life of faith was thus crowned by entrance upon the life of perfect fellowship above. 'They shall walk with Me in white.'

The chapter suitably closes with a reference to Noah. Lamech showed his faith in connection with the naming of his son, and all through the

Gen. iv. 16 —vi. 8.

story of Noah we see the secret of a living faith in God (Heb. xi. 7).

III. The Streams Blended (vi. 1-8).

III. *The Streams Blended* (vi. 1-8).—This section is closely connected with the preceding and following sections as their necessary and adequate explanation.

Man's Apostasy.

We observe the sad marks of human apostasy. Verse 1 takes up the story laid down in chapter iv. 24, and deals with the growth of the Cainites. Verse 2 speaks of the union of the two lines by inter-marriage. Some writers regard the phrase 'sons of God' as referring to the angels, and it is urged that in other passages—*e.g.* Job i. 6; Ps. xxix. 1; Dan. iii. 25—and, indeed, always elsewhere in Scripture, the phrase invariably means angels. According to this view, we have here what has recently been called an 'ætiological myth,' though the same view is held by those who regard the story not as mythical, but as absolutely historical, seeing in it a reference to the sin of the angels mentioned in Jude 6, 7 and 2 Pet. ii. 4-6. The former view, which makes it mythological, is clearly to be set aside, since on this interpretation it is difficult, if not impossible, to understand the value of the story as part of the Word of God. The latter interpretation is also unnecessary on other grounds; and the view that regards the passage as the union of the Cainites and the Sethites is at once the most natural and the most Scriptural. The idea of the phrase 'sons of God' was used in connection with Israel (Deut. xiv. 1; Hos. i. 10; xi. 1), and the teaching of subsequent Scripture is perfectly clear against the inter-marriage

of Israel with the Canaanites. Besides, this verse accounts for the universality of the sin which led to the catastrophe of the Flood, and verse 3 declares God's sentence upon man only for the sin recorded in verse 2. Surely angels would have been included in the judgment and in the record if they had been involved in this sin. Further, the 'Nephilim' of verse 4 are not said to be due to what is recorded in verse 2, but are spoken of as existing previously and subsequently. It is therefore in every way better and truer to the context to explain the passage of the two lines of Seth and of Cain, and as giving the explanation of the judgment and the Flood (Green and Lange *in loc.*)

Gen. iv. 16 —vi. 8.

As a natural result comes the Divine warning (ver. 3). The interpretation of this verse is difficult. Probably the Hebrew word rendered 'strive' would be better expressed by 'dwell.' In either case it is a warning of the limitation of mercy, and it is generally thought that the term of 120 years refers to the time yet to be given to mankind before the Flood should come upon the earth. Thus God in mercy warns while declaring His certain judgment upon evil.

God's Warning.

Nothing could well be more pitiable than this delineation of human sin (ver. 5). What a contrast we have here to the 'God saw' of chapter i. 31! Instead of everything being very good, all things were now evil. Mark carefully the phrases 'every imagination,' 'only evil continually.' Could anything be more solemn in its unrelieved gloom? No redeeming feature appears. Everything is evil

Man's Sin

Gen. iv. 16 —vi. 8.

in human life. It is also a solemn fact that most of the unholiness in human history has been due to the same cause as is mentioned here, the relations of men and women (vers. 2, 4).

God's Sorrow.

We are now bidden to note the Divine Sorrow (vers. 6, 7). The statements here are startling in their directness and definiteness. We are accustomed to speak of them as anthropomorphic; but so far from this being an objection, anthropomorphic language is our highest and best method of expression concerning God. It is no disrespect or derogation from infinite holiness to speak of God in this way. A very great deal of the objection to anthropomorphism really involves utter agnosticism and the impossibility of finding any expression for God at all (Dods, *Genesis*, pp. 60-62).

There was one exception to the universal prevalence of sin. 'Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord' (ver. 8). He and his alone were to be preserved amidst surrounding destruction.

Special Notes.

Three subjects seem to call for particular attention from students.

1. *The Longevity of the Antediluvians.*—'The longevity attributed to the antediluvians has been declared to be inconsistent with physiological laws; but in our ignorance of the extent to which the conditions affecting human life may have been modified, such an assertion is unwarranted' (Green, *Unity of the Book of Genesis*, p. 43).

2. *The Authenticity of the Chronology.*—'It

should be remarked that no computation of time is ever built in the Bible upon this or any other genealogy. . . . This genealogy could only afford a safe estimate of time on the assumption that no links are missing, and that every name in the line of descent has been recorded. But this we have no right to take for granted. The analogy of other Biblical genealogies is decidedly against it. Very commonly unimportant names are omitted; sometimes several consecutive names are dropped together. No one has a right, therefore, to denominate a primæval chronology and set it in opposition to the deductions of science, and thence conclude that there is a conflict between the Bible and science' (Green, *Unity*, pp. 49 *f.*). Gen. iv. 16 —vi. 8.

3. *The Two Genealogies.*—It is sometimes urged that there has been a confusion between the genealogy of the Cainites and that of the Sethites, owing to a certain similarity of names, six of them being nearly identical; yet the distinctness of the two genealogies is clearly stated, and in reality only two names are exactly the same in both. If it be said that the editor of Genesis evidently intended the Lamech of chapter iv. to be regarded as the Lamech of chapter v., it may perhaps be replied that centuries of readers have clearly recognised the distinction between them (Green, p. 45; Redpath *in loc.*).

Suggestions for Meditation.

In this section we have in sharp contrast two classes of men who are still to be found upon

Gen. iv. 16 —vi. 8.

earth, and whose characteristics take pretty much the same form as in those early days.

Man living without God.—In the line of Cain we have cleverness, culture, and civilisation; and yet with all these manifest advantages everything was purely earthly, selfish, and sensual. God was ignored, and they lived their life entirely apart from Him. Self-contained, occupied with their own intellectual and social pursuits, they simply ignored the claims of God, and lived and died without Him. To-day the same spirit is abroad in many quarters. Men have everything that this world can give of education, refinement, culture, pleasure, art, civilisation, and yet there is nothing of God or His Christ in their lives.

Man walking with God.—The elements of true living in relation to God are evident in the line of Seth.

(1) Devotion to God (iv. 25).
(2) Consecration to God (iv. 26).
(3) Fellowship with God (v. 22).
(4) Testimony for God (Heb. xi. 5).
(5) Service for God (v. 29).
(6) Grace from God (vi. 8).

Let us therefore keep the avenues open towards God and a constant communication between us and the sky. The house of life assuredly needs its kitchen (physical), its library (intellectual), its parlour (social); but it also needs, above all, its drawing-room—that is, its *withdrawing* room—where the soul retires from all else to seek and meet with God. Only then do we come to our

true life and realise the Divine end of existence. Our cleverness becomes devoted to the highest objects, our culture becomes transformed into a true *cultus* or worship, our civilisation is fraught with blessing to those around, and God is in all things glorified. Gen. iv. 16—vi. 8.

VII

BEFORE THE FLOOD

Gen. vi. 9-22

These *are* the generations of Noah: Noah was a just man *and* perfect in his generations, *and* Noah walked with God.

And Noah begat three sons, Shem, Ham, and Japheth.

The earth also was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence.

And God looked upon the earth, and, behold, it was corrupt: for all flesh had corrupted his way upon the earth.

And God said unto Noah, The end of all flesh is come before Me; for the earth is filled with violence through them; and, behold, I will destroy them with the earth.

Make thee an ark of gopher wood; rooms shalt thou make in the ark, and shalt pitch it within and without with pitch.

And this *is the fashion* which thou shalt make it *of*: The length of the ark *shall be* three hundred cubits, the breadth of it fifty cubits, and the height of it thirty cubits.

A window shalt thou make to the ark, and in a cubit shalt thou finish it above; and the door of the ark shalt thou set in the side thereof; *with* lower, second, and third *stories* shalt thou make it.

And, behold, I, even I, do bring a flood of waters upon the earth, to destroy all flesh, wherein *is* the breath of life, from under heaven; *and* every thing that *is* in the earth shall die.

But with thee will I establish My covenant; and thou shalt come into the ark, thou, and thy sons, and thy wife, and thy sons' wives with thee.

And of every living thing of all flesh, two of every *sort* shalt thou bring into the ark, to keep *them* alive with thee; they shall be male and female.

Of fowls after their kind, and of cattle after their kind, of every creeping thing of the earth after his kind, two of every *sort* shall come unto thee, to keep *them* alive.

And take thou unto thee of all food that is eaten, and thou shalt gather *it* to thee ; and it shall be for food for thee, and for them.

Thus did Noah ; according to all that God commanded him, so did he.

A NEW section of Genesis commences here. The period from Adam to Noah is almost entirely passed over, probably because there was nothing to record as to the progress of the Kingdom of God. Instead of such a record we have, by contrast, only the solemn and significant summary of the awful progress of sin. We have already seen the development of wickedness which culminated in the awful sins referred to in the previous verses. There is no indication in the Bible of man's steady rise from a lower to a higher level, developing out of barbarism into holiness. On the contrary, the race is seen to tend downward in proportion as it is left to follow its own way. This view of man's proneness to evil, with the consequent results, is in exact keeping with the facts of history, and with all the best and most accurate anthropological knowledge of the present day (Orr, *Image of God, passim*). Gen. vi. 9-22.

The entire section dealing with 'the generations of Noah' (chap. vi. 9 to ix. 29) should be looked at as a whole, and its completeness noted :— The Generations of Noah.

1. Noah and his Sons (chap. vi. 9, 10).

2. The Sinfulness and Condemnation of the World (chap. vi. 11-13).

3. The Divine Command (chap. vi. 14-21).

4. The Obedience of Noah (chap. vi. 22 to vii. 9).

Gen. vi. 9-22.

5. The Flood (chap. vii. 10-24).

6. The Divine Preservation of the Ark (chap. viii. 1-22).

7. The New Covenant (chap. ix. 1-17).

8. The New Start (chap. ix. 18-29).

In studying this material in detail it is important to notice the combination of formal phraseology with the vividness and detail—*e.g.*, chapter vi. 17-20 and chapter viii. 20-22. The dignity of the narrative is also noteworthy. There is nothing grotesque or unworthy, everything is sober and in keeping with the solemn realities involved. The simplicity and genuineness of Noah's character, the simple and righteous motives ascribed to God, the sobriety and purity of the promise made to Noah, should all be observed. Not least of all it will be noticed that the story of the Flood, as such, is quite incidental to the spiritual realities that arise out of the events. The narrative leads up to the covenant in chapter ix., which carries with it the new start of the human race after the failure between Adam and Noah.

The Flood.

It is impossible to dwell in detail on the entire narrative of the Flood: it must suffice to follow mainly the pages of our English Bible, and look at the spiritual truths associated with (1) the period immediately preceding the Flood, (2) the time of the Flood itself, and (3) the early days of the new era after the Flood. We now dwell first of all upon the verses at the head of this section.

The contrast between the sin recorded in verse

7 and the character of Noah in verses 8-10 is very striking, especially as it is followed by another contrast in the verses now before us. Gen. vi. 9-22.

I. *The Divine Purpose* (vers. 9-13) is now clearly stated to be a judgment upon sin. Its cause is due to the awful character of mankind (ver. 11). The two words, 'corrupt' and 'violence,' give us respectively the character and expression of the sin, the cause and the effect. The corruption has led to violence, for badness always leads to cruelty in one form or another. A life that is wrong with God necessarily becomes wrong with its fellows. I. The Divine Purpose (vers. 9-13).

The Divine Scrutiny is also stated in simple but solemn terms (ver. 12). 'God looked upon the earth, and, behold, it was corrupt.' How great is the contrast here with a former occasion: 'God saw everything that He had made, and, behold, it was very good' (chap. i. 31). God is not indifferent to human life, and the fact of sin necessarily compelled Him to take action. His decision to destroy the earth was at once an expression of His justice and His mercy; the end had come, and there was no alternative. Moral putridity can only be destroyed by a Divine judgment.

II. *The Divine Plan* (vers. 14-17).—The method of deliverance was the Ark of Safety about which God now proceeds to speak. The instructions are given in full detail. The ark is to be made of gopher wood, by which is probably to be understood some resinous wood like that of the fir or cypress tree. The vessel was in no sense a ship II. The Divine Plan (vers. 14-17).

Gen. vi. 9-22.

intended for a voyage, but a kind of covered raft or floating house, sufficient for buoyancy and protection during the flood. Into the details of shape and space it is unnecessary to enter, except to notice the minute care shown by these details and the indications they afford of the Divine thought for the inmates of the ark.

With great solemnity God announces his intention of bringing a flood upon the earth to destroy all life. 'Behold, I, even I, do bring a flood of waters upon the earth.' Thus solemnly does God call His servant's attention to what is to happen and also to the fact that the flood is His own divine act.

III. The Divine Provision (vers. 18-22).

III. *The Divine Provision* (vers. 18-22).—In contrast with the announcement of the flood comes this declaration of the divine covenant. It is noteworthy that we have the word 'establish' in connection with the covenant. Noah was already in covenant with God (ver. 8), but in view of the special need of assurance of divine protection God now declares that He will establish His covenant. This is the first occasion on which we have this word 'covenant,' one of the great outstanding expressions of Holy Scripture as indicative of God's relations with man. It is particularly interesting to notice that the covenant was with Noah only, his family being included because of their connection with him. It is worth while observing that in Holy Scripture the family rather than the individual constitutes the true unity. The race, as we well know, fell in Adam, and here in like manner Noah's family was saved

for his sake. Other instances like those of Abraham and Cain confirm this view of what is now usually described as the solidarity of mankind. The Apostle Peter, on the Day of Pentecost, seems to recognise the same principle when he says, 'The promise is to you, and to your children.' What a responsibility this places upon parentage and guardianship and every other position involving the lives of others. Gen. vi. 9-22.

God's care of the animals is not to be overlooked in the study of these verses. 'Two of every sort shall come unto thee, to keep them alive' (ver. 20).

To all this Noah made a fitting response (ver. 22). Twice over we are told simply and suggestively that he did 'according to all that God commanded him.'

Suggestions for Meditation.

In these verses we have some of the essential elements in the life of a true believer as illustrated by Noah.

1. *His Position* (ver. 8). 'Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord.' This was the foundation of his life as it is the foundation of every true life to-day. 'By grace are ye saved.' Grace, in the Bible sense of the word, means God's unmerited favour, and it was this alone that gave Noah his spiritual position before God. He was 'saved by grace alone.'

2. *His Attitude* (ver. 9). 'Noah was a righteous man.' From grace comes righteousness, and whether we think of its Old Testament meaning of genuineness and sincerity, or of its New Testament fuller

Gen. vi. 9-22.

meaning of being right with God, we can see its necessity and importance for every one of us.'

3. *His Character* (ver. 9). 'Noah was . . . perfect.' The original word means upright, genuine, and has no reference to the absence of sin. Uprightness in turn is the result of being righteous before God through grace. Our personal character must necessarily be the proof of our true position in the sight of God.

4. *His Testimony* (ver. 9). 'In his generations.' Here we have brought before us the thought of Noah's life in relation to his contemporaries. He lived a life of witness to God among those with whom he was associated. As the Apostle Peter tells us, he was 'a preacher of righteousness' (2 Pet. ii. 5). His life as well as his words bore testimony to God and thus 'condemned the world' of his day (Heb. xi. 7).

5. *His Fellowship* (ver. 9). 'Noah walked with God.' He is one of two men of whom this is recorded (chap. v. 22). The idea is that of friendship and fellowship with God, and it is noteworthy that such a position was possible amidst the very difficult, practical, every-day life that Noah had to lead. It meant courage and independence, for no one else was walking in that way. When a man walks with God it necessarily means that he cannot walk with any of his fellows who are going in the opposite direction.

6. *His Conduct* (ver. 22). 'Thus did Noah.' His spiritual position, attitude, character and

fellowship were expressed and proved in practical obedience. Nothing can make up for this. All our privileges and opportunities of grace are intended to be manifested in daily obedience. 'Conduct is three-fourths of life.' Gen. vi. 9-22.

7. *His Thoroughness* (ver. 22). 'According to all that God commanded him.' This was the standard by which Noah lived, the Word of God and everything that that Word had declared. He did not pick and choose among God's commands but did 'according to all' that God had said. It was this Word of God that led him to prepare the ark, 'being warned of God of things not seen as yet' (Heb. xi. 7).

What a splendid figure this man makes, a picture of solitary goodness! He was the one saint of that day. It *is* possible, therefore, to be good even though we have to stand alone. It is possible to be right with God even amidst surrounding iniquity. God is the same to-day as He was to Noah, and if only we are willing to fulfil the conditions we too shall walk with God and please Him.

VIII

AT THE FLOOD

Gen. vii.

And the Lord said unto Noah, Come thou and all thy house into the ark; for thee have I seen righteous before Me in this generation.

Of every clean beast thou shalt take to thee by sevens, the male and his female: and of beasts that *are* not clean by two, the male and his female.

Of fowls also of the air by sevens, the male and the female; to keep seed alive upon the face of all the earth.

For yet seven days, and I will cause it to rain upon the earth forty days and forty nights; and every living substance that I have made will I destroy from off the face of the earth.

And Noah did according unto all that the Lord commanded him.

And Noah *was* six hundred years old when the flood of waters was upon the earth.

And Noah went in, and his sons, and his wife, and his sons' wives with him, into the ark, because of the waters of the flood.

Of clean beasts, and of beasts that *are* not clean, and of fowls, and of every thing that creepeth upon the earth,

There went in two and two unto Noah into the ark, the male and the female, as God had commanded Noah.

And it came to pass, after seven days, that the waters of the flood were upon the earth.

In the six hundredth year of Noah's life, in the second month, the seventeenth day of the month, the same day were all the fountains of the great deep broken up, and the windows of heaven were opened.

And the rain was upon the earth forty days and forty nights.

In the self-same day entered Noah, and Shem, and Ham, and Japheth, the sons of Noah, and Noah's wife, and the three wives of his sons with them, into the ark;

They, and every beast after his kind, and all the cattle after their kind, and every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth

after his kind, and every fowl after his kind, every bird of every sort.

And they went in unto Noah into the ark, two and two of all flesh, wherein *is* the breath of life.

And they that went in, went in male and female of all flesh, as God had commanded him: and the Lord shut him in.

And the flood was forty days upon the earth; and the waters increased, and bare up the ark, and it was lift up above the earth.

And the waters prevailed, and were increased greatly upon the earth; and the ark went upon the face of the waters.

And the waters prevailed exceedingly upon the earth; and all the high hills that *were* under the whole heaven *were* covered.

Fifteen cubits upward did the waters prevail; and the mountains were covered.

And all flesh died that moved upon the earth, both of fowl, and of cattle, and of beast, and of every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth, and every man:

All in whose nostrils *was* the breath of life, of all that *was* in the dry *land*, died.

And every living substance was destroyed which was upon the face of the ground, both man, and cattle, and the creeping things, and the fowl of the heaven; and they were destroyed from the earth: and Noah only remained *alive*, and they that *were* with him in the ark.

And the waters prevailed upon the earth an hundred and fifty days.

IN view of the brief and summary character of the first five chapters of Genesis it cannot but be noticed how full of detail these chapters are in their record of the Flood. Bearing in mind the constant spiritual purpose of the book it would seem as though we are intended to study as carefully as possible every detail in order to learn the lessons God would teach us. Gen. vii.

I. *The Record of the Events.*—This chapter is noteworthy for the points of time mentioned. The details can best be studied along these lines. I. The Record of the Events.

First, we have the last week preceding the flood (vers. 1-6). During this time God gave the final

Gen. vii.

invitation to Noah, and announced to him the coming of the flood within seven days.

Then we have the day on which Noah entered into the ark (vers. 7-10). It requires very little imagination to realise the solemnity of the occasion, and the procession and the entrance of all those who were to be preserved from the Flood.

Next comes a record of the forty days of rain (vers. 11-17). Together with the rain we are told of the movements of the great deep, both combining to bring about the Divine judgment.

The chapter closes with the statement of the one hundred and fifty days during which 'the waters prevailed upon the earth' (vers. 18-24). The word 'prevailed' is the keynote of this section, and may suggest not merely a physical prevalence of the Flood, but a spiritual prevalence of Divine judgment, irresistible, irretrievable, irrevocable.

II. The Facts of the Flood.

II. *The Facts of the Flood.*—The evidence for the destruction of the human race except one family is very strong apart from Genesis. It seems impossible that so widespread and persistent a tradition can be regarded as an invention or myth. There is nothing mythical or unworthy about the Bible account, and it is perhaps worth while observing that the proportions of the ark are not essentially different from those of ships of corresponding size now sailing between here and America. It is scarcely likely that the pro-

portions given in Genesis could be mere guess work. Gen. vii.

Further, the tendency of recent geological discoveries is to render the account in Genesis more credible than it was even twenty-five years ago. There are clear proofs of a widespread catastrophe to animals and plants immediately preceding the period of man's appearance on the earth, and it is urged by some geologists that these changes suggest that man was introduced into the world before the instability of the glacial period had given way to the apparent stability of the present order of affairs. All this, while it is, of course, no proof of the genuineness of Genesis, is distinctly in keeping with the narrative there given (*Geology's Witness to the Flood*, by Dr G. F. Wright, *American Sunday School Times*, July 6, 1901).

III. Was the Flood Universal?

III. *Was the Flood Universal?*—It is essential, in considering this question, to view it from the standpoint of the writer of Genesis. Then we at once realise that to an eye-witness, or to one dealing with the subject from the standpoint of human sin and Divine judgment, the universality of the Flood would be certain, even though the area was quite local. The description of the Flood, so far as the destruction of human life is concerned, would be much the same, whether local or literally universal. The one and only purpose of the writer seems to be the record of the destruction of man.

The universal tradition of the Flood is no

Gen. vii.

necessary proof of its universality, since the tradition, as handed down, would be necessarily carried wherever men went. At the same time there are geological facts in different parts of the world which seem to suggest something more than a local flood in Western Asia. The narrative in Genesis has been aptly likened to a sea captain's log-book (Wright, *ut supra*), and certainly all the universality demanded is that which was necessary for the destruction of the human race. The spiritual purpose of the narrative, which is, of course, the predominant factor, would be perfectly realised by supposing that the Flood was confined to the locality then inhabited by the human race (*Pulpit Commentary, Genesis,* pp. 119 *f.*; Urquhart, *New Biblical Guide,* vol. i., chapters xi., xii., xiii.; Howorth's *Mammoth and the Flood*).

IV. The Flood in Tradition.

IV. *The Flood in Tradition.* — According to Lenormant the story of the Flood is a 'universal tradition in all branches of the human family, with the sole exception of the black race.' The Babylonian tradition is remarkably like the Hebrew account, and at the same time remarkably unlike. The coincidences suggest a community of origin, while the divergences show that there cannot have been any direct influence of Babylonia on the Hebrew account.

It is hardly likely that the Jews would have copied it from any Exilic records possessed by their inveterate foe. As is well known, the Babylonian account is grossly polytheistic, while the

Hebrew is as purely monotheistic, and no theory of their relationship will ever be satisfactory unless the divergences as well as the coincidences are accounted for. It is much more natural to believe that the Hebrew preserves for us the pure spiritual version of the tradition, and that the Babylonian account is a corrupt version. Gen. vii.

The antecedents of Abraham are ample to account for the Hebrew tradition, and if we may assume that he brought it with him to Canaan we can quite understand how the purer account was preserved. Civilisation in the days prior to Abraham shows that this view is perfectly reasonable and even likely.

V. *The Flood in Genesis.* — It is urged that two, if not three, accounts are united, not by the blending of excerpts, as in previous sections, but by close interweaving. This is argued on the grounds that each account is complete in itself, and that only thus can the repetitions and alternations of the Divine names be accounted for. It may, however, be pointed out that each account is not complete, for if the sections attributed to each source respectively are read continuously, it will be found that there are gaps of great importance, and no real continuity of the narrative. V. The Flood in Genesis.

The story as it stands has a unity, and certainly was intended by the compiler to be regarded as a whole. If we allow the recognised thirty days to the month, and commence with Noah's six hundredth birthday as in chapter vii. 11, we shall

Gen. vii. find that there is no inconsistency in the chronology.

The use of the Divine names gives us the two aspects of the Flood in relation to the God of Judgment (Elohim) and the God of Grace (Jehovah). Both titles are used, and that with remarkable discrimination, while on the partition theory the differences of use are inexplicable. It is admitted by one leading critic that other phraseological criteria, apart from the use of the Divine names, are slight; while another critic holds that the theory of a division of the narrative based upon this distinction of usage of Divine names is now 'manifestly exploded, and the disproof is absolute and irrefragable.'

Above all, the theory of two documents entirely fails to account for the Chaldæan narrative of the Flood, which contains the characteristics both of the alleged author who uses Elohim and of the one who uses Jehovah. There are at least twenty-five items of the story of the Flood common to Genesis and the Assyrian tablet; and as these items cover nearly the entire story they necessarily include nearly all the literary characteristics upon which criticism bases its claim of two documents. As this tablet is said to be as old as 3000 B.C. (Hastings' *Bible Dictionary*), it is difficult to understand how we are to account for the separate narratives of the two authors, who are said to have lived more than a thousand years later.

The story in Genesis undoubtedly appears before

us as a unity; and even if there were originally two stories they have been remarkably well blended into one. Certainly contradictions only arise when the attempt is made to dissect the narrative as it now stands (Green, *Unity of Genesis, in loc.*; Everts, *Homiletic Review*, vol. xl. p. 124; Sayce, *Monument Facts and Higher Critical Fancies*). Gen. vii.

Suggestions for Meditation.

If in chapter vi. we find we have a portrait of the servant in relation to God, in chapter vii. we have a number of statements concerning God in relation to His servant.

1. *The Divine Invitation* (ver. 1). — 'Come thou.' This is the first time that the familiar word 'Come' occurs. It is found some six hundred times in the rest of the Bible. It is noteworthy that God said 'Come' into the ark, not 'Go.' Surely we have here the suggestion that in some sense God would be with him there. 'His presence is salvation.' The personal character of the invitation is also noteworthy, 'Come *thou*.' Yet again, the inclusion of his family in the invitation should be observed, 'Come thou and all thy house.'

2. *The Divine Observation* (ver. 1). — 'Thee have I seen.' The thought of God watching His servants is at once a joy and a responsibility, an inspiration and a warning. When the life is wholly surrendered to God and lived in genuine sincerity the thought of 'Thou God seest me' is a delight. Not seldom in Holy Scripture have we expressions telling us that God is 'well pleased'

Gen. vii.

with His faithful servants. The thought that our life can give pleasure to God is one of the greatest incentives to holy living.

3. *The Divine Requirement* (ver. 1).—'Righteous before Me.' This practically sums up everything that God demands from man. Article XI. of the Church of England defines justification as 'accounted righteous before God.' Somewhat similar in idea is the description of Zacharias and Elisabeth. 'They were both righteous before God' (see Gen. xvii. 1; 1 Kings ix. 4; 2 Kings xx. 3; Job i. 1; Acts xxiii. 1; Phil. iii. 6). The Old Testament is necessarily concerned only with the divine requirement of righteousness. It remained for New Testament times to reveal the provision of a perfect righteousness in Christ Jesus (Rom. iii. 20-26).

4. *The Divine Testimony* (ver. 1).—'Righteous before Me in this generation.' Once again we have the thought of Noah's contemporaries brought before us, but this time from the divine side. God here proclaims His servant's righteousness, and bears witness thereto. Like Abel and Enoch before him, 'he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of' his life (Heb. xi. 4-7). 'When a man's ways please the Lord' God always lets other people know it.

5. *The Divine Commandment* (ver. 5).—'The Lord commanded him.' The Word of God is brought constantly before us in connection with Noah (chaps. vi. 13, 22; vii. 5, 9, 16; viii. 15, 21; ix. 1, 8, 12, 17), as indeed it is all through the Bible. God speaks, man listens; God commands,

man obeys. The Word of God is at once the standard and the guide of life, and no life or service is possible unless it is ever subject thereto. Gen. vii.

6. *The Divine Protection* (ver. 16). — 'The Lord shut him in.' This suggests that he was not dependent upon himself for safety, but upon the Lord. It was a divine, not a human fastening, that guaranteed his perfect shelter. Those whom God protects never need have any fear.

7. *The Divine Preservation* (chap. viii. 1).— 'God remembered Noah.' The servant was not forgotten by his Lord, and this point, which is the culminating thought of the section, shows the constant divine care of Noah and his family. There is only one thing that God forgets with reference to His children, that is, their sins. 'Their sins and iniquities will I remember no more.' As for God's people themselves, the words are blessedly and eternally true, 'They shall not be forgotten of Me.'

IX

AFTER THE FLOOD

Gen. viii.

And God remembered Noah, and every living thing, and all the cattle that *was* with him in the ark: and God made a wind to pass over the earth, and the waters asswaged:

The fountains also of the deep and the windows of heaven were stopped, and the rain from heaven was restrained;

And the waters returned from off the earth continually: and after the end of the hundred and fifty days the waters were abated.

And the ark rested in the seventh month, on the seventeenth day of the month, upon the mountains of Ararat.

And the waters decreased continually until the tenth month: in the tenth *month*, on the first *day* of the month, were the tops of the mountains seen.

And it came to pass at the end of forty days, that Noah opened the window of the ark which he had made:

And he sent forth a raven, which went forth to and fro, until the waters were dried up from off the earth.

And he sent forth a dove from him, to see if the waters were abated from off the face of the ground:

But the dove found no rest for the sole of her foot, and she returned unto him into the ark, for the waters *were* on the face of the whole earth: then he put forth his hand, and took her, and pulled her in unto him into the ark.

And he stayed yet other seven days, and again he sent forth the dove out of the ark;

And the dove came in to him in the evening; and, lo, in her mouth *was* an olive leaf pluckt off: so Noah knew that the waters were abated from off the earth.

And he stayed yet other seven days; and sent forth the dove; which returned not again unto him any more.

And it came to pass in the six hundredth and first year, in the first *month*, the first *day* of the month, the waters were dried up

from off the earth: and Noah removed the covering of the ark, and looked, and, behold, the face of the ground was dry.

And in the second month, on the seven and twentieth day of the month, was the earth dried.

And God spake unto Noah, saying,

Go forth of the ark, thou, and thy wife, and thy sons, and thy sons' wives with thee.

Bring forth with thee every living thing that *is* with thee, of all flesh, *both* of fowl, and of cattle, and of every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth; that they may breed abundantly in the earth, and be fruitful, and multiply upon the earth.

And Noah went forth, and his sons, and his wife, and his sons' wives with him:

Every beast, every creeping thing, and every fowl, *and* whatsoever creepeth upon the earth, after their kinds, went forth out of the ark.

And Noah builded an altar unto the Lord; and took of every clean beast, and of every clean fowl, and offered burnt offerings on the altar.

And the Lord smelled a sweet savour; and the Lord said in His heart, I will not again curse the ground any more for man's sake; for the imagination of man's heart *is* evil from his youth; neither will I again smite any more every thing living, as I have done.

While the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease.

AGAIN we are impressed with the remarkable detail of the history. Yet human history, as such and in itself, has no real place in the Old Testament. It is only human life, as seen in the light of the divine purpose, that is recorded in the Word of God. The divine and the human elements are here blended and contrasted, and along these lines the chapter will best be studied. Gen. viii.

I. *The Lord's Action* (vers. 1-5).—The divine judgment is now drawing to its close. The servant is remembered by God and the covenant established is now to be carried out in full. The waters from above and below were restrained, and the ark now I. The Lord's Action (vers. 1-5).

Gen. viii. rests in safety upon the mountains of Ararat. The place of rest seems to have been the territory known by the name of one of the peaks (*cf.* 2 Kings xix. 37, R.V.).

II. The Servant's Attitude (vers. 6-14).

II. *The Servant's Attitude* (vers. 6-14).—It was an attitude of Faith. Noah was on the alert and responsive to the divine movements. Having opened the window, he sent forth a raven, which wandered hither and thither and did not return. Then he sent forth a dove, but the dove found no resting-place and returned to him in the ark.

It was also an attitude of Hope. Having waited seven days more, again he sent forth a dove, and the dove came back with an olive leaf, so that Noah now knew that the waters were abating.

It was also an attitude of Patience. He waited seven days longer before sending out the dove a third time, and when the dove did not return, Noah must have known that the day of deliverance was at hand.

When God pledges His word and establishes His covenant, His servants have a strong foundation for their faith, hope, and patience.

> 'How firm a foundation, ye saints of the Lord,
> Is laid for your faith in His excellent Word!
> What more can He say, than to you He hath said—
> To you, who for refuge to Jesus have fled.'

III. The Lord's Command (vers. 15-17).

III. *The Lord's Command* (vers. 15-17). — At last the time had come for Noah to leave the ark, and the Word which had so clearly told him to enter, now with equal clearness tells him to come

forth with his family, and to bring forth with him everything that he had taken in. God never commands before the time required for obedience. Step by step He makes known His will. He is never too soon and never too late. Gen. viii.

IV. *The Servant's Obedience* (vers. 18, 19).—As the servant had obeyed implicitly, accurately, and immediately before the Flood, so he does now. He went forth at once at the command of God. Obedience to be real must be prompt and full. This is one of the supreme tests of genuine living. IV. The Servant's Obedience (vers. 18, 19).

V. *The Servant's Consecration* (ver. 20). — Noah's first act on landing upon the earth was to build an altar and to offer sacrifices. Thereby he testified at once (*a*) to his gratitude to God for deliverance, (*b*) to his need of sacrifice in approaching his God, and (*c*) to the consecration of his life to the service of God as symbolised by the burnt offering. V. The Servant's Consecration (ver. 20).

VI. *The Lord's Revelation* (vers. 21, 22).—In response there is a twofold movement of God. First there is the acceptance of the sacrifice, 'The Lord smelled a sweet savour.' Quite literally the phrase is, 'a savour of rest,' the word apparently being a play upon the meaning of Noah (chap. v. 29). God thus signified His acceptance of what His servant had done in offering 'a sacrifice to God for a sweet smelling savour' (Eph. v. 2). VI. The Lord's Revelation (vers. 21, 22).

Following the acceptance of the sacrifice was the divine assurance with special reference to the future of the earth. There was to be no more curse in the form of a flood, and there was to be an absolute

Gen. viii. guarantee of the permanence of the seasons, year by year, as long as the earth remained.

Thus the Lord and His servant revealed their attitudes towards each other all through this chapter, and we have in it one of the most suggestive pictures of God in relation to man, and of man in relation to God.

Suggestions for Meditation. Let us now review these three chapters (vi.-viii.), and read them afresh in the light of New Testament teaching. In view of the words of the Apostle Peter (1 Pet. iii. 20), it is not wrong to regard the story of the flood as a great pictorial and symbolical lesson full of spiritual truths. It is sometimes said that history never repeats itself, but there is a sense in which it does in relation to spiritual and moral realities. Our Lord distinctly tells us that the history of Noah will repeat itself in the day of His coming (Matt. xxiv. 37-42). What were the days of Noah, and what will be the days of the Son of Man?

1. *Days of sin.*

(*a*) God's Way was abandoned. The earth had become corrupt through sin, and man's heart was only evil continually.

(*b*) God's Word was speaking. The Ark was the Divine protest against sin; while Noah, a preacher of righteousness, ever witnessed to the certainty of retribution and the limited time of God's Spirit among men (chap. vi. 3).

(*c*) God's Will was unheeded. For 120 years

Noah preached without obtaining a single convert. This shows the awful extent of man's depravity, and the certainty of that wrath of God which is the manifestation of the Divine holiness against sin. 'It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of a living God.' Gen. viii.

2. *Days of sorrow.*

We think of the people at the time of the Flood, and our thought goes on to those who will be living similarly in the days of the Son of Man.

(*a*) God's Message was neglected. Every nail driven into the ark was like an appeal from God, and yet all the testimony was fruitless year after year.

(*b*) God's Refuge was rejected. There was no other way of salvation except the Ark; no human device was sufficient. They might get up to the highest peak of the highest hill, and yet there would be no salvation.

(*c*) God's Gift was lost. They had the offer of salvation and life. They neglected and then rejected it, and as a consequence they lost it.

3. *Days of salvation.*

(*a*) God's Grace was working. Noah was the solitary saint of those days, and this shows that goodness is possible, even amidst the most adverse circumstances. He lived as well as preached; his life testified as well as his words to the reality and opportunity of the grace of God.

(*b*) God's Love was planning. The instructions about the Ark, the invitation to enter, the protection within the Ark, the cessation of the Flood,

Gen. viii. and the deliverance of Noah and his house, all testify to the reality of God's love in providing this way of salvation.

(*c*) God's Power was keeping. How significant it is to read, 'The Lord shut him in'! There was ample room and perfect provision in the Ark. No anxiety, no possibility of leakage or wreck; one door of entrance, and that protected by Divine power. The Ark was a home for saved people. So far as we know, there was no sail, no mast, no rudder; only God! And that was enough!

Thus, as it was in the days of Noah, so will it be in the days of the Son of Man. Days of evil and yet of good. Amid the evil days an opportunity for salvation and an invitation to partake of the Divine mercy. Days of peril and of loss; and yet the opportunity of pardon, peace, protection, preservation. 'Now is the accepted time; now is the day of salvation.'

X

THE NEW ERA

Gen. ix. 1-17

And God blessed Noah and his sons, and said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth.

And the fear of you, and the dread of you, shall be upon every beast of the earth, and upon every fowl of the air, upon all that moveth *upon* the earth, and upon all the fishes of the sea; into your hand are they delivered.

Every moving thing that liveth shall be meat for you; even as the green herb have I given you all things.

But flesh with the life thereof, *which is* the blood thereof, shall ye not eat.

And surely your blood of your lives will I require: at the hand of every beast will I require it, and at the hand of man; at the hand of every man's brother will I require the life of man.

Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed: for in the image of God made He man.

And you, be ye fruitful, and multiply; bring forth abundantly in the earth, and multiply therein.

And God spake unto Noah, and to his sons with him, saying,

And I, behold, I establish my covenant with you, and with your seed after you;

And with every living creature that *is* with you, of the fowl, of the cattle, and of every beast of the earth with you; from all that go out of the ark, to every beast of the earth.

And I will establish My covenant with you; neither shall all flesh be cut off any more by the waters of a flood; neither shall there any more be a flood to destroy the earth.

And God said, This *is* the token of the covenant which I make between Me and you and every living creature that *is* with you, for perpetual generations:

I do set My bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a token of a covenant between Me and the earth.

And it shall come to pass, when I bring a cloud over the earth, that the bow shall be seen in the cloud:

And I will remember My covenant, which *is* between Me and you and every living creature of all flesh ; and the waters shall no more become a flood to destroy all flesh.

And the bow shall be in the cloud ; and I will look upon it, that I may remember the everlasting covenant between God and every living creature of all flesh that *is* upon the earth.

And God said unto Noah, This *is* the token of the covenant, which I have established between Me and all flesh that *is* upon the earth.

Gen. ix. 1-17.

NOAH now takes his place as the second head of the human race. There was to be a new beginning, a fresh start, full of hope and with every Divine guarantee of blessing. Sin had been punished, grace was working, and God was ready to guide and bless those through whom the earth was to be peopled and ruled.

I. The Elements of a new Commencement (vers. 1-7).

I. *The Elements of a New Commencement* (vers. 1-7).—The new start is made at the only possible point, that of the Divine blessing (ver. 1). 'God blessed Noah and his sons.' Just as God blessed Adam and Eve (chap. i. 28), so it was necessary that the same Divine blessing should rest upon the new progenitors of the human race.

Divine exhortation naturally follows Divine blessing (ver. 1). 'Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth.' Again we are reminded of the primeval command (chap. i. 28). God thereby took the necessary steps for the propagation of life.

The Divine promise appropriately follows (ver. 2). Noah is assured that fear and dread should be upon everything on the earth for his sake. Into his hands they were all to be delivered, thereby assuring him of protection and power.

Divine provision was also assured to him (ver.

3). Food and sustenance were thus assured. It would seem from a comparison of this verse with chapter i. 29, that it was only after the Flood that animal food was permitted to man. Gen. ix. 1-17.

Divine prohibition is included in this new commencement (ver. 4). The sacredness of life is taught by this prohibition about the eating of blood, and still more the thought of what that blood was to symbolise in atonement is probably here first brought before us (Lev. iii. 17).

Divine warnings are another element in this passage (ver. 6). Noah and his sons are told still more about the sanctity of life. Blood shed will be required, and this great principle is based upon the highest sanction, for 'in the image of God made He man.'

Divine expectations fitly close the section (ver. 7). God again exhorts and encourages Noah and his sons to fruitfulness, thus indicating that He expected them to fulfil the conditions of life and blessing, and to realise thereby the Divine purpose.

II. *The Establishment of a New Covenant* (vers. 8-17).—It is often said that God never gives a command without providing the grace needed to obey, and we have a striking illustration of this great principle in the passage before us. Following naturally and appropriately after the Divine counsels given in the preceding section we have the assurance of needed grace in connection with the Divine covenant. II. The Establishment of a new Covenant (vers. 8-17).

The Source of the covenant naturally comes first (ver. 9). Its author was God. Human —Its Source.

Gen. ix. 1-17.

covenants were entered into mutually between two parties, but here the entire initiation was taken by God. 'I, behold, I' (ver. 9); 'I will' (ver. 11); 'I make' (ver. 12); 'I have established' (ver. 17). The significance of this is due to the fact that it was of God's free grace alone that the covenant was made. His blessings were to be bestowed even though nothing had been done by man to deserve them. Everything is of grace from first to last.

—Its Scope.

The Scope of the covenant is also noteworthy (vers. 9, 10). It comprehended Noah and his seed, and not only these, but 'every living creature.' Thus the blessings of God were to be extended as widely over the earth as they could possibly be. This is not the only place in Scripture where the destiny of the lower creation is intimately connected with that of man (Isa. xi. 6-8; Rom. viii. 19-22).

—Its Purpose.

The Purpose of the covenant should be carefully noted (ver. 11). It was associated with the assurance that human life should not be cut off or the world destroyed any more by a flood. The appropriateness of this revelation is apparent, for at that time it must have been a real perplexity to know whether there would be any repetition in the future of what they had experienced in the Flood. Everything connected with their relations to God had been altered by that catastrophe, and now God does not leave man ignorant, but, on the contrary, pledges Himself not to bring another similar judgment upon the earth.

The Sign of the covenant is specially emphasised (vers. 12, 13). The rainbow is now given a specific spiritual meaning, and nature for the first time becomes a symbol of spiritual truth. We know from subsequent passages what a great principle is brought before us in this way. It is what is known as the 'sacramental principle.' In one of the Homilies of the Church of England, Sacraments are defined as 'visible signs to which are annexed promises,' and the rainbow was the first of such visible signs illustrative of spiritual truths. We think of the Passover Lamb, the Brazen Serpent, Gideon's Fleece, and especially of Baptism and the Lord's Supper as illustrations of this Divine method of revealing and assuring us of spiritual truth. As Lange beautifully says, 'God's eye of grace and our eye of faith meet in the Sacraments.' Our faith lays hold of the promise annexed to the sign, and the sign strengthens and confirms our faith that God will fulfil His word. At the same time it must never be forgotten that if there is no faith in the promise there can be no assurance in the sign. The word and the sign necessarily go together, and can never be separated. This revelation of the spiritual meaning of the rainbow was God's response to Noah's altar. Divine faithfulness thus answered to human faith, and it is of real interest that in the symbol of the prophet Ezekiel (chap. i. 28), and of the Apocalypse (Rev. iv. 3 ; x. 1), the rainbow is again brought before us.

Gen. ix. 1-17. —Its Sign.

The Message of the covenant should be care-

Gen. ix. 1-17. —Its Message.

fully pondered (vers. 14, 15). It was an assurance of God's faithfulness. He was prepared to carry out all His promises, notwithstanding all the previous failures of mankind. The emphasis upon *My* covenant and *My* bow should be noted (*cf.* vi. 18), and it is specially to be observed that the sign of the covenant is associated with God's remembrance rather than man's. 'I will remember' (ver. 15). 'I will look upon it, that I may remember' (ver. 16).

—Its Duration.

The Duration of the covenant is also revealed (vers. 12, 16). 'For perpetual generations.' 'The everlasting covenant.' The unconditional and permanent character of the covenant is thus emphasised. God did not demand any pledge of obedience in response to the covenant, but assured Noah of the unconditional Divine faithfulness to His word throughout all generations.

—Its Guarantee.

The Guarantee of the covenant is not to be overlooked (ver. 17). 'God said unto Noah, This is the token of the covenant.' The covenant is thus based upon the Divine word. It is God's character and word that guarantee the fulfilling of His promises. 'Two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie' (Heb. vi. 18). Here is our strong and invincible assurance, the unchanging faithfulness of the word of the living God.

Suggestions for Meditation.

The word 'covenant' is one of the great Bible words. It means 'a coming together' (co-venant, *con-venire*). As used of a human transaction, it

implies a bargain, one party giving and the other receiving. It also sometimes partakes of the nature of a voluntary undertaking or pledge, without any expectation of a return. This latter view is its characteristic in the passage before us, for we read only of God's covenant with Noah, not Noah's covenant with God. God binds Himself, and lays down the line of His relationship to man. It was for Noah simply to receive this, to reckon upon it, and to rely upon its blessings. It was essentially a covenant of grace, and like the New Covenant of the Gospel, the essence of it is a gift. Gen. ix. 1-17.

1. *The Contents of the Covenant.*—It declared God's mercy in relation to the past. It told Noah that there would not be another flood of judgment.

It declared God's power in relation to the present. It reminded the patriarch and his sons that they could depend upon the regular order of nature not being disturbed, and not being subject to chance and mere caprice.

It declared God's faithfulness in relation to the future. It bid them look forward, and rest quietly in the assurance, that as each day came, all would be well with their life.

It declared God's grace in relation to man. There is a clear distinction between mercy and grace. Mercy partakes largely of the element of pity and compassion for those who are in need. Grace is much more than this, and is God's attitude of unmerited, undeserved favour towards

Gen. ix. 1-17.

those who are not merely negatively non-deserving, but also to those who are positively undeserving. The covenant of grace is at the foundation of everything which God bestows upon us.

It was intended to elicit faith. This was to be the human response to the Divine faithfulness. Man's trust was to answer to God's truth, and in this confidence man would find peace and strength.

It was intended to elicit hope. Hope differs from faith in this respect, that it looks onward to the future rather than being limited to the present. Faith accepts a present gift, hope expects a future gift. Faith looks upward to the Promiser, hope looks forward to the thing promised. Faith appropriates here and now, hope anticipates the coming blessing. Day by day Noah and his sons were intended to exercise hope as they rested upon the covenant of God.

It was intended to elicit love. Just as the altar expressed Noah's gratitude, so we may be perfectly sure that this renewal and establishment of the covenant would stir him to grateful and adoring love. 'We love, because He first loved us.'

2. *The Characteristics of the Covenant.*—Let us dwell on the rainbow as illustrating the Divine Covenant.

Consider its naturalness. A temporal feature was used to express and symbolise spiritual truths. God definitely associated nature with grace. This is but one out of many instances in which nature is a symbol of the supernatural.

Consider its conspicuousness. All could see the rainbow, and the covenant of God in like manner was intended to be seen by all without difficulty or hindrance. Gen. ix. 1-17.

Consider its universality. As the rainbow in the heavens so was the universal scope of the covenant. All the earth was included in it, not one of God's creatures was exempted.

Consider its uniqueness. The rainbow has been rightly described as the joint product of storm and sunshine. It comes from the effects of the sun on the drops of rain in a rain-cloud. So is it with the covenant of God. On the one hand it is due to the cloud of human sin, on the other to the sunshine of Divine grace.

Consider its beauty. There is scarcely anything more exquisitely beautiful than the rainbow, and assuredly there is nothing in this universe more beautiful than the grace of God. The term 'grace' has for one of its meanings that of 'beauty,' and the Apostle Peter speaks of 'the variegated grace of God' (1 Pet. iv. 10). John Wesley aptly writes of the 'Victorious sweetness of the grace of God.'

> 'Grace, 'tis a charming sound,
> Harmonious to the ear.'

Consider its union of earth and heaven. As the rainbow spans the sky and reaches the earth, so is it with the covenant of grace. Like Jacob's ladder, it is set up on the earth and the top reaches to heaven.

Consider its permanence. Mr Eugene Stock

Gen. ix. 1-17.

(*Lesson Studies in Genesis*) calls attention to the fact that while we do not always see a rainbow owing to the clouds hiding the sun, yet if we could get above the clouds we should see the rainbow on them. Thus 'there is never rain without a rainbow being visible if we could only get to the right spot to see it, but God is always above the clouds and He always sees it.' This is exactly what is taught us. 'The bow shall be in the cloud, and I will look upon it.' It is not our sight of the rainbow, but God's, that constitutes the power and peace of this covenant.

The clouds may go and come,
And storms may sweep my sky—
This blood-sealed friendship changes not:
The cross is ever nigh.

My love is oft-times low,
My joy still ebbs and flows;
But peace with Him remains the same—
No change Jehovah knows.

I change, He changes not,
The Christ can never die;
His love, not mine, the resting-place,
His truth, not mine, the tie.

XI

A BELIEVER'S FALL

Gen. ix. 18-29.

And the sons of Noah, that went forth of the ark, were Shem, and Ham, and Japheth: and Ham *is* the father of Canaan.

These *are* the three sons of Noah: and of them was the whole earth overspread.

And Noah began *to be* an husbandman, and he planted a vineyard:

And he drank of the wine, and was drunken; and he was uncovered within his tent.

And Ham, the father of Canaan, saw the nakedness of his father, and told his two brethren without.

And Shem and Japheth took a garment, and laid *it* upon both their shoulders, and went backward, and covered the nakedness of their father; and their faces *were* backward, and they saw not their father's nakedness.

And Noah awoke from his wine, and knew what his younger son had done unto him.

And he said, Cursed *be* Canaan; a servant of servants shall he be unto his brethren.

And he said, Blessed *be* the Lord God of Shem; and Canaan shall be his servant.

God shall enlarge Japheth, and he shall dwell in the tents of Shem; and Canaan shall be his servant.

And Noah lived after the flood three hundred and fifty years.

And all the days of Noah were nine hundred and fifty years: and he died.

THE events recorded in the preceding section might well suggest that henceforth everything would be well with Noah and his sons. A new Gen. ix. 18-29.

Gen. ix. 18-29.

start had been made amid great hopes, with perfect provision and a Divine assurance. Yet here comes the record of failure. As we read it our hearts are full of disappointment, and yet, if we may use human language, what must the Divine disappointment have been. As God afterwards said about Israel, 'What could have been done more to My vineyard, that I have not done in it' (Isa. v. 4)? It is evident that the Divine judgment at the Flood had not extirpated the evil in human nature, and as we ponder this solemn lesson, we should take care to apply it to ourselves. It is much easier to feel sad about Noah than to be on the watch about our own life.

I. The Sons (vers. 18, 19).

I. *The Sons* (vers. 18, 19).—The names of Noah's sons have been given before (v. 32; vi. 10; vii. 13); they are given again here because the narrative specially concerns them. In the reference to Canaan we have an anticipation of chapter x. 6, in order to prepare for what is recorded of him in verse 25 of the present section. The three sons of Noah are described as the heads of the three divisions of the human race (ver. 19), and it is by reason of their importance in this connection that the incident now recorded finds its full significance. Their action is soon seen to affect others.

II. The Sins (vers. 20, 21).

II. *The Sins* (vers. 20, 21).—The occasion of the sins of Noah, it should be observed, was his daily occupation. They were committed in the course of his ordinary work. It was a perfectly legitimate calling as a husbandman to plant a vineyard, and

no blame is attached to him in this respect. It is a point worthy of careful notice, that legitimate occupations may easily become the occasions of wrong doing. Gen. ix. 18-29.

The first of Noah's sins was that of drunkenness. Now whatever views Christian men may hold as to the lawfulness or wisdom of moderate drinking, there is no question whatever about the fact and heinousness of the sin of drunkenness as revealed in the Scriptures. It is writ large on all parts of the Word of God. Warnings and denunciations abound in the Old Testament, while in the New, drunkenness is included in St Paul's catalogue of the works of the flesh with all the nameless and most shameful of evils (see Prov. xxiii. 20; Isa. v. 11, 22; xxviii. 1-7; Luke xxi. 34; Rom. xiii. 13; 1 Cor. v. 11, and vi. 10; Gal. v. 21; Eph. v. 18; 1 Thes. v. 8). The story of Noah is the first recorded instance of a sin that has since become well known and even prevalent almost all over the world.

Associated with drunkenness was the sin of immodesty. The Hebrew clearly indicates a deliberate act, and not a mere unconscious effect of drunkenness. The two sins of intemperance and impurity have often been associated, and indeed the association has become proverbial. Of the unutterable sadness of this sin of a servant of God it is quite unnecessary to speak.

III. *The Shame* (ver. 22).—Although the narrative does not mention the shame that accrued to Noah, it is not difficult to realise what it must III. The Shame (ver. 22).

Gen. ix. 18-29.

have been. To think that one who had passed through the thrilling and unique experiences of the Flood and the associated events should have been guilty of such conduct was a fact full of unspeakable shame. The corruption of the best is always the worst thing possible.

Still more shameful was the conduct of his son, Ham. He had no sense of filial love or even of common decency. We seem to see depravity here, of no ordinary degree. Not only was he guilty of the plain sin of omission in failing to shield and hide his father's shame; he was guilty also of a sin of commission in calling attention to the circumstances, and endeavouring to get his brothers to share in his sin. It has been pointed out that Noah's sin must surely have been a solitary act, for Ham would not have done this to his father if the circumstances had been familiar. Candlish suggests that in the light of Canaan's probable association with his father, the act was a token of a deliberate opposition to Noah on religious grounds. Be this as it may, the sin against filial respect and honour is sufficiently heinous.

IV. The Sorrow (vers. 23, 24).

IV. *The Sorrow* (vers. 23, 24).—The two brothers refused to share in Ham's sin. With filial love, true purity, and, as we can believe, profound sorrow, they took immediate steps to cover their father's shame. After all, he was their father, they owed everything to him, and however deeply he had fallen, it was not for them to do anything but hide his and their unspeakable sorrow and shame. They restored him in the spirit of love and meekness (Gal.

vi. 1), perhaps not unmindful of the possibilities of sin in themselves. Gen. ix. 18-29.

And what must Noah's sorrow have been when he awoke and knew all. When he realised what he himself had done, and when he discovered what his son had done to him, we can well imagine the profound sorrow and sense of shame that filled his heart. He who had 'found grace in the eyes of the Lord' (vi. 8), he who had been testified of by God as the only upright one in that age (vii. 1), he who had been the honoured instrument of declaring and doing God's will in circumstances such as would never happen again—he it is who had now awoke to a consciousness of awful sin in himself and his home.

V. *The Retribution* (ver. 23).—The curse pronounced on Canaan was not the result of any personal feeling on the part of Noah, for Ham the father is not mentioned as included in the curse. Noah is here, as it were, among the prophets, and foresees the future in which the curse of Canaan shall be realised. It is a real difficulty how to explain the connection of Canaan with the sin that is attributed to his father Ham. It is perhaps best to understand the matter according to the old Jewish tradition, that Canaan was somehow involved in the sin and was associated with his father in the mockery of Noah. It has been well said that Ham sinned as a son and was punished in his son. This is the third curse mentioned in Genesis (chaps. iii. 14-17; iv. 11). V. The Retribution (ver. 25).

The servitude of Canaan here foretold was

Gen. ix. 18-29.

subsequently seen in the course of history. 'Servant of servants' is the Hebrew superlative for 'greatest possible servitude,' and we know how true this has worked out. Canaan was to be a slave both to Shem and Japheth. The land of Canaan was subjugated by Israel, and the Canaanites became the servants of the Semitic race. In a still wider sense the descendants of Ham in Africa have for centuries been the slaves of the Japhethic races.

VI. The Reward (vers. 26, 27).

VI. *The Reward* (vers. 26, 27).—The supremacy of Shem is foretold with reference to their religious privileges. Jehovah is to be their God, and, if the Hebrew may thus be rendered, it is Jehovah Who is to dwell in the tents of Shem. The truth of this is readily seen when we think of the preservation of Monotheism amongst the Jews amidst all the false religions that surrounded them. Above all, Christ belonged to the race of Shem, and Christianity was first proclaimed and spread abroad by Semites.

The prophecy about Japheth indicates great prosperity and the multiplication of descendants. 'God shall enlarge Japheth.' If the rendering of the English versions is correct that Japheth is to 'dwell in the tents of Shem,' we know that as a matter of fact the Christian Gentile nations have indeed superseded the family of Shem in religious privileges, and have entered upon their inheritance of spiritual blessing and earthly power. It is at least striking that the political control of human affairs is now in the hands of the Japhethic line.

A Believer's Fall

Gen. ix. 18-29.

VII. The Result (vers. 28, 29).

It is impossible to say how long after the Flood this sad event took place, but inasmuch as Noah lived three hundred and fifty years after the Flood we may rightly assume that he lived long after this fall, and did not repeat his terrible sin. His fall is never mentioned elsewhere in Scripture, and we may fairly believe in his complete restoration. Still, the memory must necessarily have remained to cloud the glory of his former days.

Suggestions for Meditation.

1. *A Believer is never immune from sin.*—However far we may advance in the Christian life, however rich and deep our experiences, the evil principle still remains, and may at any time gain the upper hand. The infection of sin remains in the regenerate, and this is a fact that needs to be faced day by day.

2. *A Believer often finds small temptations the most dangerous.*—It was in his ordinary duty that Noah found the occasion of his fall. Many a man can meet a great crisis who fails before a simple duty. The little things of life frequently constitute the most searching test.

3. *A Believer is always liable to experience entirely new temptations.*—As the days go on evil often takes entirely novel forms. A man may have had a special weakness in youth and fought against it for years, only to find other weaknesses breaking out and new sins coming upon him in mature and old age.

4. *A Believer may be the occasion of sin in others.*—How sad to think of the influence of

Gen. ix. 18-29.

Noah on his sons. It is only one solitary instance of the great law that no one ever sins alone. The solidarity of human life is such that others are inevitably affected by the evil that we do.

5. *A Believer will suffer most bitterly for his backsliding.*— We may be perfectly certain that Noah was never without the shadow of his sin, although his life might have been wholly bright. The Spirit of God makes the repentant believer more and more sensitive, and he does not cease to grieve over aberrations from the pathway of right.

6. *A Believer is always conscious of the utter impartiality of God.*— No vice or sin is ever hidden or extenuated. The sins and faults of the men of God are dealt with with perfect frankness and impartiality in the Word of God, and so it is in daily experience. God has no favourites.

7. *A Believer need never fall into sin.*—Although the evil principle remains with us to the end of this life, the provision of grace is such that sinning is absolutely unnecessary. The promise stands absolute and universal in its application. 'Sin shall not have dominion over you' (Rom. vi. 14), and the explanation is accordingly given, 'Ye are under grace.' The grace of God is more than sufficient to meet every need. The Spirit of God dwelling in the heart and possessing it is able to counteract the strongest force of the evil nature; and while, according to Romans vii., the evil nature, in and by itself, will always assert itself, the true

full Christian life is that which is depicted in Romans viii., which commences with 'No condemnation,' and ends with 'No separation,' since 'we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us.'

Gen. ix. 18-29.

XII

A WIDE OUTLOOK

Gen. x.

Now these *are* the generations of the sons of Noah ; Shem, Ham, and Japheth : and unto them were sons born after the flood.

The sons of Japheth ; Gomer, and Magog, and Madai, and Javan, and Tubal, and Meshech, and Tiras.

And the sons of Gomer ; Ashkenaz, and Riphath, and Togarmah.

And the sons of Javan ; Elishah, and Tarshish, Kittim, and Dodanim.

By these were the isles of the Gentiles divided in their lands ; every one after his tongue, after their families, in their nations.

And the sons of Ham ; Cush, and Mizraim, and Phut, and Canaan.

And the sons of Cush ; Seba, and Havilah, and Sabtah, and Raamah, and Sabtechah : and the sons of Raamah ; Sheba, and Dedan.

And Cush begat Nimrod : he began to be a mighty one in the earth.

He was a mighty hunter before the Lord : wherefore it is said, Even as Nimrod the mighty hunter before the Lord.

And the beginning of his kingdom was Babel, and Erech, and Accad, and Calneh, in the land of Shinar.

Out of that land went forth Asshur, and builded Nineveh, and the city Rehoboth, and Calah,

And Resen between Nineveh and Calah : the same *is* a great city.

And Mizraim begat Ludim, and Anamim, and Lehabim, and Naphtuhim,

And Pathrusim, and Casluhim (out of whom came Philistim), and Caphtorim.

And Canaan begat Sidon his first-born, and Heth,

And the Jebusite and the Amorite, and the Girgasite,

And the Hivite, and the Arkite, and the Sinite,

And the Arvadite, and the Zemarite, and the Hamathite: and afterward were the families of the Canaanites spread abroad.

And the border of the Canaanites was from Sidon, as thou comest to Gerar, unto Gaza; as thou goest unto Sodom, and Gomorrah, and Admah, and Zeboim, even unto Lasha.

These *are* the sons of Ham, after their families, after their tongues, in their countries, *and* in their nations.

Unto Shem also, the father of all the children of Eber, the brother of Japheth the elder, even to him were *children* born.

The children of Shem; Elam, and Asshur, and Arphaxad, and Lud, and Aram.

And the children of Aram; Uz, and Hul, and Gether, and Mash.

And Arphaxad begat Salah; and Salah begat Eber.

And unto Eber were born two sons: the name of one *was* Peleg; for in his days was the earth divided; and his brother's name was Joktan.

And Joktan begat Almodad, and Sheleph, and Hazarmaveth, and Jerah,

And Hadoram, and Uzal, and Diklah,

And Obal, and Abimael, and Sheba,

And Ophir, and Havilah, and Jobab: all these *were* the sons of Joktan.

And their dwelling was from Mesha, as thou goest unto Sephar, a mount of the east.

These *are* the sons of Shem, after their families, after their tongues, in their lands, after their nations.

These *are* the families of the sons of Noah, after their generations, in their nations: and by these were the nations divided in the earth after the flood.

AT first sight this chapter seems quite remote from the spiritual character of the preceding and following sections, but further consideration shows that it is in direct line with the religious purpose of Genesis. In chapter v. we have a list of the descendants of Adam ending with Noah, and in this chapter there naturally follows a list of Noah's descendants, until we reach Terah, the father of Abraham. In chapter x. 1 the sons of Noah are mentioned in the familiar order, Shem, Ham, and Japheth, but in the remainder of the chapter

Gen. x.

Gen. x.

A Survey of the Nations.

their descendants are taken in the opposite order, Japheth, Ham, Shem. This is an example of the characteristic, already mentioned, of dealing with collateral branches first, and only after that considering the main stream in the descendants of Shem. The religious purpose of the chapter must therefore be continually kept in view. This table of nations shows their kinship with the chosen race, out of which all spiritual blessing is to come. Then the nations are dismissed from the Scripture record, and attention concentrated on the Semitic line. Saphir (*The Divine Unity of Scripture*) truly says, 'The tenth chapter of Genesis is a very remarkable chapter. Before God leaves, as it were, the nations to themselves and begins to deal with Israel, His chosen people from Abraham downward, He takes a loving farewell of all the nations of the earth, as much as to say, "I am going to leave you for a while, but I love you. I have created you: I have ordered all your future"; and their different genealogies are traced.'

It is impossible to enter in detail upon the classification of this chapter. It must suffice to call attention to its ethnological, genealogical, geographical, and biographical aspects. The four words (ver. 31), 'families,' 'tongues,' 'lands,' 'nations,' show the varied character of the classification. The precise principle of classification must thus include all these elements; the personal aspect is sometimes individual and sometimes tribal.

It is also to be carefully observed that there is no attempt at completeness in the list. Several of the more modern nations which came later into close contact with Israel, as Moab, Ammon, Edom, Amalek, find no mention here, while on the other hand not all the most ancient of the nations are included. The names of seventy nations are found here, fourteen associated with Japheth, thirty with Ham, and twenty-six with Shem. This number seventy is familiar from other parts of Scripture (chaps. xlvi. 27 ; Exod. xxiv. 1-9), and is evidently symbolical. Lange rightly speaks of the 'high antiquity' of the chapter, and this is confirmed by Professor Sayce in his Archæological Commentary on Genesis. There is no reference in the chapter to the time posterior to Abraham. For the purpose of detailed study of the many interesting and important points which arise out of it, reference may be made to Sayce's Archæological Commentary on Genesis (*Expository Times*, vol. viii. p. 82 *ff.*) ; Cave (*Inspiration of the Old Testament*, Lecture iii.) ; Lange (*Commentary on Genesis*, p. 346 *ff.*) ; Urquhart (*The Bible and How to Read It*, vol. ii. p. 2 *ff.*). It is only possible to call attention to a few of the outstanding features with special reference to the spiritual meaning of the chapter. Gen. x.

I. *The Family of Japheth* (vers. 2-5).—Here it is unnecessary and perhaps impossible to identify the names with those of subsequent races and countries, but attention should certainly be concentrated on verse 5 with its reference to Gentiles. Viewed I. The Family of Japheth (vers. 2-5).

Gen. x.

from the standpoint of the Jews it is clear that the Gentile nations arose from Japheth. This early reference to 'the nations,' to use the Hebrew phrase of later books, is very significant, and shows that amid all the Jewish exclusiveness the Old Testament never loses sight of the great fact of universality and God's purposes for all the world. It was the crowning sin of the Jews in later ages that they forgot this and concentrated attention upon themselves as the chosen people of God, stopping short of the great truth of their revealed religion that they were chosen only for the purpose of being the instrument and channel of God's mercy and grace to 'the nations' of the whole earth. Even to-day there is a great deal of ignorance among Christian people as to the note of universality that is struck so often in the Old Testament. A study of the Psalms and the Prophets in the Revised Version, with special reference to the phrase in the plural, 'the nations,' would do much to correct this.

II. The Family of Ham (vers. 6-20).

II. *The Family of Ham* (vers. 6-20).—The first point that stands out with prominence in regard to the family of Ham is the reference to Nimrod (vers. 8, 9), and the word 'mighty' in these verses is the same in the Hebrew as that used in chapter vi. 4. It would seem as though Nimrod represented a revival of the antediluvian spirit of independence and rebellion with its disregard of God and His authority. Nimrod, however, is specially associated with the founding of Babel, or Babylon, and this first mention of a word

which is so familiar elsewhere should be specially noted. Babylon henceforward stands for everything that is godless, and for the great opponent of the people of God. It was a 'Babylonish garment' (Josh. vii. 21) that led to the first sin in the promised land, and it was Babylon in one form or another that caused most of the trouble to the nation of Israel. In the Old Testament Babylon is a godless city and empire, in the New Testament it is a godless system, and it would form a study of the greatest possible significance and value to look at all the passages where Babylon is mentioned, until at length we come to its destruction as recorded in the Apocalypse (chap. xviii.). The other point in this section is the prominence given to Canaan and his descendants (vers. 15-19). This is doubtless because of the connection of Canaan with Israel in the light of subsequent history. Sayce (*ut supra*) says, 'The age to which the chapter takes us back is indicated by the position given to Canaan. It is a position that was true of it only during the age of the eighteenth and nineteenth Egyptian dynasties. . . . After that age no one would have dreamed of coupling Canaan and Egypt together.'

Gen. x.

III. *The Family of Shem* (vers. 21-31).—Shem is described as 'the father of all the children of Eber,' and this prominence given to Eber seems to bear out the suggestion that 'Hebrew' comes from Eber. Eber is also mentioned (ver. 25) as having two sons, Peleg and Joktan. It was in the time of

III. The Family of Shem (vers. 21-31).

Gen. x.

the former that the earth was divided, the reference probably being an anticipation of the confusion of Babel recorded in detail in the next chapter.

Thus we have this brief and suggestive account of the families of Noah, and the division of the earth by means of them. The authenticity and genuineness of the chapter may be seen from the simple fact that as late as the date of 1 Chronicles nothing more was known of the origin of the nations, and consequently the writer of Chronicles followed this list, for with only slight variations it is repeated there (1 Chron. i.). Canon Rawlinson remarks that these lists have 'extorted the admiration of modern ethnologists, who continually find in them anticipations of their greatest discoveries.' Up to the present moment ethnology cannot get behind the division of mankind into three primary groups. It remains to be added that archæological studies have gone to confirm the facts recorded here.

Suggestions for Meditation.

Keeping in view the religious and spiritual purpose of the chapter when read in the light of the entire book of Genesis, we notice several spiritual lessons.

1. *All Nations are of one blood.*—Or as the R.V. reads, 'He made of one every nation of men.' This is surely one of the most remarkable facts arising out of this chapter. Such representative critics as Dillmann, and the Bishop of Winchester, call attention to the spiritual significance of this chapter in

the Hebrew Scriptures. 'It reminded the Israelite Gen. x.
that God had made of one blood all the nations of the earth, and that the heathen who knew not Jehovah were nevertheless brethren of Israel. It reminded him that his own nation was only one among the nations of the earth by origin, and in no way separated from them, but only by the grace of God selected and chosen to be the bearer of His revelation to the world' (Ryle, *Early Narratives of Genesis*). Dillmann is equally clear as to the uniqueness of this feature. 'The fundamental idea of the survey is to point out the ultimate relationship of all these peoples. This idea is important . . . not much attention was paid as a rule to foreigners, unless national or trade interests were at stake. Often enough they were despised as mere barbarians, and in no case were they included with the more cultured nations in a higher community. It is otherwise in our text. Here, many with whom the Israelites had no sort of actual relationship are taken into consideration. . . . All men and peoples are of the same race, of the same rank, and with the same destiny, brothers and relatives of one another' (Dillmann, *Genesis*, vol. i. p. 314). When it is remembered that no other nation ever taught the brotherhood of man, but on the contrary despised and opposed it, we can surely see marks of divine inspiration in the way in which all nations are mentioned in this chapter. Ranke says of this chapter, 'It is impossible to read it without seeing that there is something here different from all other

Gen. x.

history, and that the national pride and separation which we see everywhere else has been entirely subjugated by the religious idea, that all the different tribes of the earth are related to one another by their common descent from Shem, Ham, and Japheth.' There is also a practical lesson for ourselves. There is no such thing as 'foreign' missionary work. 'All souls are Mine,' and no one can say where home missions end and foreign missions begin. Here, then, is our great charter of world-wide evangelisation. 'Go ye, and teach all nations' (Matt. xxviii. 19). 'Before Him shall be gathered all nations' (Matt. xxv. 32). 'All nations' (Rev. vii. 9).

2. *All Nations have one need.*—The thought of sin is clearly implied throughout this chapter, as indeed throughout the book. Common trouble and disease rest upon all. 'There is no difference, for all have sinned.' Amid every variety of race, circumstance, place, and temperament, this one great fact of sin, deep-seated, ineradicable by human means, is experienced by all. It is this thought that gives point to the proclamation of the Gospel everywhere, that it meets one and the same great need.

3. *All Nations have one way of salvation.*—God's method of redemption, while working through Shem, is intended to include in its beneficent scope the descendants of Ham and Japheth as well. The Jewish Messiah is the world's Saviour, and the blessing of Abraham is intended to come on the Gentiles through

Jesus Christ (Gal. iii. 7-14). All workers for missions will find not a little of their warrant and inspiration as they ponder this chapter in the light of the subsequent teaching of the Word of God. Gen. x.

XIII

THE TOWER OF BABEL

Gen. xi. 1-9

And the whole earth was of one language, and of one speech.

And it came to pass, as they journeyed from the east, that they found a plain in the land of Shinar; and they dwelt there.

And they said one to another, Go to, let us make brick, and burn them throughly. And they had brick for stone, and slime had they for mortar.

And they said, Go to, let us build us a city, and a tower whose top *may reach* unto heaven; and let us make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth.

And the Lord came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of men builded.

And the Lord said, Behold, the people *is* one, and they have all one language; and this they begin to do: and now nothing will be restrained from them, which they have imagined to do.

Go to, let us go down, and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another's speech.

So the Lord scattered them abroad from thence upon the face of all the earth: and they left off to build the city.

Therefore is the name of it called Babel; because the Lord did there confound the language of all the earth: and from thence did the Lord scatter them abroad upon the face of all the earth.

Gen. xi. 1-9.

THE events of this section apparently happened earlier than some of those recorded in chapter x., for it is probable that this gives us the detailed account of that division of the earth which happened in the days of Peleg (chap. x. 25). Dispersion may have been divinely intended,

and notified to the sons of Noah, and this episode of Babel may have been the human response of unwillingness to follow the divine command. It should be observed that there is no trace of Babylonian origin in this story, and no indications of its being based upon Babylonian myth, the mythical element being entirely absent. Gen. xi. 1-9.

I. *Human Life* (vers. 1-3).—Mankind is described as possessing at the time oneness of language, whatever that language was. There was also a natural nomadic element, for they were journeying from place to place. The conditions of agricultural life would doubtless necessitate a great deal of movement. In their journeyings they at last arrived at the land of Shinar, the plain in which Babylon was afterwards situated (chap. x. 10). The fertility of this plain would be of special value, and we are not surprised to read that 'they dwelt there.' I. Human Life (vers. 1-3).

They soon conceived the plan of a prolonged stay and definite association, for they proposed to one another to make brick and build a city and a tower. The alluvial soil of the plain would give them facilities for clay and brickmaking, thereby providing materials for building. This was quite natural, because of the absence of stone in that region.

The primary motive in building the city, apart from the story of the tower, may well have been the innocent desire to remain associated, and to be protected by means of the city. At any rate, unless there had been a Divine revelation, it is

Gen. xi. 1-9.

difficult at this stage to charge them with any breach of a known law of God.

II. Human Sin (ver. 4).

II. *Human Sin* (ver. 4).—Before long their objects (if innocent) degenerated into evil. To have a rendezvous might not in itself have been wrong, though there may have been associated with this desire a wish to remain together which possibly conflicted with the purposes of God for mankind at that stage. Whether this was so or not, the desire for a tower 'whose top might reach to heaven' seems to have been prompted by something like pride and self-sufficiency. It is thought by some authorities that a religious question was involved in this tower, and that it was intended for an idolatrous temple. At any rate it is certainly true that Babylon afterwards became one of the worst and most terrible strongholds of idolatry and false religion.

One thing, however, is perfectly clear—they were filled with a godless ambition. 'Let us make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad.' In view of the fact that the Hebrew word for 'name' is '*shem*,' it is not altogether impossible that the suggestion 'to make a *shem*' had in it some covert sneer against the family of Shem, which had been assured of the Divine presence and blessing (chap. ix. 26); and the fear lest they should be scattered abroad is fairly chargeable with distrust in God, Whose purpose it was that they should be dispersed and people the whole earth. He Who commanded them to scatter abroad would not leave them unsafe and un-

protected. Altogether, this is a revelation of human sin in the form of rebellion against God, and it has not been wrongly described as the first organisation of the scheme of godlessness and irreligion. Gen. xi. 1-9.

III. *Divine Consideration* (vers. 5, 6).—The description of God's attitude here recorded is striking in its simplicity. 'The Lord came down to see.' Man had just attempted to go *up* in his sin. God now comes *down* in judgment. Again we have what has been already seen several times in these early chapters, the revelation of the Divine scrutiny and examination, showing that God is intent upon His people's ways and cannot be indifferent to their attitude to Him. The result of this scrutiny is that God anticipates what the people will do, and He decides that nothing will restrain them from that which they have purposed to effect. The fact of their oneness of language would give them this remarkable power of united effort on a large scale. It was necessary, therefore, to face the problem and deal with it in the best possible way. III. Divine Consideration (vers. 5, 6).

IV. *Divine Action* (vers. 7, 9).—The method employed was that of the confusion of their language, and their subsequent dispersion. We are told that they left off to build the city, and it is not known whether or not they finished the tower. Into the question of the identity of the tower ruins found on the site of Babylon it is unnecessary to enter here. IV. Divine Action (vers. 7, 9).

Dr Dale thinks that dissension among the work-

Gen. xi. 1-9.

men was the first step leading to dispersion, and that the confusion of language came as the necessary consequence of this dispersion, the language being modified by separation from one another. It is worth noticing that history and archæology bear clear testimony to the fact of confusion of languages. Bunsen (quoted in Lange's *Commentary*) says:—'Comparative philology would have been compelled to set forth as a postulate the supposition of some such division of languages in Asia, especially on the ground of the relation of the Egyptian language to the Shemitic, even if the Bible had not assured us of the truth of this great historical event. It is truly wonderful, it is a matter of astonishment, that something so purely historical, something so conformable to reason, is here related to us out of the oldest primeval period, and which now, for the first time, through the new science of philology, has become capable of being historically and philosophically explained.'

The memorial of their confusion remained in the city that they had built, and Babel from this time forward occupies a definite, not to say prominent part, in the record contained in the Scriptures. Babylon is never long out of sight, until at length it finds its complete and final overthrow in the Apocalypse.

Suggestions for Meditation.

1. *The danger and disaster of life without God.*—It is very striking, that in connection with Cain we have the first elements of human civilisa-

tion, and here again we have the building of a city connected with those who were evidently indifferent to God. At first it was not so much iniquity as simple indifference. God was not in their life, but from indifference soon came rebellion, as is always the case. Whenever a religious system glorifies humanity and makes man everything, it is not long before it minimises God and makes Him nothing. Culture, civilisation, intellect, cleverness, progress, are all among the natural gifts of God to human life, and there is no reason whatever why they should not all be consecrated to the Divine service. When they are thus yielded to Him they become doubly powerful, and are the means of blessing on every hand. When, however, they are not handed over to God Who gives them, but are kept in man's own power and authority, they lead men farther and farther from God, and are the means of nothing but trouble on every hand. Gen. xi. 1-9.

2. *The danger and disaster of all false unity.* — These people attempted to keep themselves together by means of the outward and visible tie of a common dwelling-place and rallying-point. They had nothing in common except the city which they built. This, however, proved fatal, and always will prove fatal to real unity. Unity must come from within. When outward unity is attempted the result will be, as in this case, separation, dispersion, confusion. What a lesson we have here in connection with all attempts at church unity. How often churches have

Gen. xi. 1-9.

attempted to keep Christians together by means of outward elements only or mainly. Sometimes it has been unanimity of opinion, and this has proved impossible. Sometimes it has been uniformity of observance and ceremonial, but this has proved equally futile. Sometimes it has been a unity of organisation, but this has never once succeeded. Unity must be a unity of life, of love, of interest, of intention, of spirit, of service, and this unity can be obtained and maintained amidst a great variety of organisation, of opinion, of ceremonial. Our Lord speaks of the Jewish *fold*, and then of the unity of a *flock* including other than Jews (John x. 16, R.V.), the latter being far the more important, for it is possible to have one flock consisting of very different kinds of sheep and in many folds, yet all belonging to the one Master.

3. *The blessedness of true unity.* — There are three pictures in God's Word which ought always to be considered together. The confusion of tongues in Genesis xi.; the real unity amid diversities of tongues as the result of the gift of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost in Acts ii.; and the magnificent picture of 'all nations, and kindreds, and tongues' in Revelation vii. as they stand before the throne. With the Babel of earth we set in contrast the Jerusalem that is above. To the city of man we oppose the city of God. True unity is always primarily the result of an organism, and only secondarily of an organisation. It is based upon God and upon spiritual life in Him.

The Tower of Babel

'There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, Who is above all, and through all, and in you all' (Eph. iv. 4-6).

Gen. xi. 1-9.

XIV

THE CALL OF ABRAHAM

Gen. xi. 10—xii. 9.

These *are* the generations of Shem: Shem *was* an hundred years old, and begat Arphaxad two years after the flood.

And Shem lived, after he begat Arphaxad, five hundred years, and begat sons and daughters.

And Arphaxad lived five and thirty years, and begat Salah.

And Arphaxad lived, after he begat Salah, four hundred and three years, and begat sons and daughters.

And Salah lived thirty years, and begat Eber.

And Salah lived, after he begat Eber, four hundred and three years, and begat sons and daughters.

And Eber lived four and thirty years, and begat Peleg.

And Eber lived, after he begat Peleg, four hundred and thirty years, and begat sons and daughters.

And Peleg lived thirty years, and begat Reu.

And Peleg lived after he begat Reu, two hundred and nine years, and begat sons and daughters.

And Reu lived two and thirty years, and begat Serug.

And Reu lived, after he begat Serug two hundred and seven years, and begat sons and daughters.

And Serug lived thirty years, and begat Nahor.

And Serug lived, after he begat Nahor, two hundred years, and begat sons and daughters.

And Nahor lived nine and twenty years, and begat Terah.

And Nahor lived, after he begat Terah, an hundred and nineteen years, and begat sons and daughters.

And Terah lived seventy years, and begat Abram, Nahor, and Haran.

Now these *are* the generations of Terah: Terah begat Abram, Nahor, and Haran; and Haran begat Lot,

And Haran died before his father Terah in the land of his nativity, in Ur of the Chaldees.

And Abram and Nahor took them wives: the name of Abram's wife *was* Sarai; and the name of Nahor's wife, Milcah, the daughter of Haran, the father of Milcah, and the father of Iscah.

But Sarai was barren; she *had* no child.

And Terah took Abram his son, and Lot the son of Haran, his son's son, and Sarai his daughter-in-law, his son Abram's wife; and went forth with them from Ur of the Chaldees, to go into the land of Canaan; and they came unto Haran, and dwelt there.

And the days of Terah were two hundred and five years: and Terah died in Haran.

Now the LORD had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will show thee.

And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing:

And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.

So Abram departed, as the LORD had spoken unto him; and Lot went with him: and Abram *was* seventy and five years old when he departed out of Haran.

And Abram took Sarai his wife, and Lot his brother's son, and all their substance that they had gathered, and the souls that they had gotten in Haran; and they went forth to go into the land of Canaan; and into the land of Canaan they came.

And Abram passed through the land unto the place of Sichem, unto the plain of Moreh. And the Canaanite *was* then in the land.

And the LORD appeared unto Abram, and said, Unto thy seed will I give this land: and there builded he an altar unto the LORD, who appeared unto him.

And he removed from thence unto a mountain on the east of Beth-el, and pitched his tent, *having* Beth-el on the west, and Hai on the east: and there he builded an altar unto the LORD, and called upon the name of the LORD.

And Abram journeyed, going on still towards the south.

Gen. xi. 10 —xii. 9.

A New Departure.

WITH this section the Book of Genesis takes a new and very distinct departure. From the consideration of the entire human race (chaps. x. and xi.) our attention is directed to one family and one man as the chosen channel of the Divine purpose of redemption for the race. The earlier chapters are but a preface, though a necessary explanatory preface, to the remainder They cover at least two thousand

Gen. xi. 10 —xii. 9.

years, and yet we seem to be, as it were, hurried along, until we reach the fulness of the narrative about Abraham and his seed. The first eleven chapters are the foundation of which the other thirty-nine are the superstructure. They trace back the Divine redemption until its cause is found in the sin of the human race, and its scope is shown to embrace all mankind. This done, we are now free to consider the precise method whereby God accomplished His purpose, and redeemed mankind through the instrumentality of one man, his family, and his nation. It is the importance of Abraham in this connection that gives its meaning and importance to chapter xii. of this book. As the root to the stem so are chapters i.-xi. to xii.-l., and as the stem to the tree so is Genesis to the rest of the Bible. It is the foundation, the explanation, the preface, the key to the rest of the Word of God.

Abraham: The Friend of God.

There is only one man of those whose lives are recorded in the Old Testament who has the high privilege of being called the 'friend of God.' Isa. xli. 8, 'Abraham, My friend'; 2 Chron. xx. 7, 'Abraham, Thy friend'; (*cf.* Jas. ii. 23). To this day Abraham is known among the Arabs as *El Khalil* (Friend of God). The study of his life is one of the deepest interest on two grounds: (1) Personal: he is one of the noblest and most heroic figures in ancient history; (2) Spiritual: he was God's chosen instrument for the realisation of the divine purposes of redemption.

The importance of Abraham can readily be seen

by the space given to him in the record, nearly fourteen chapters out of fifty being devoted to him. It may be well to summarise the record of his life for the purpose of obtaining a general view of its history. Gen. xi. 10 —xii. 9.

(*a*) Chapters xii.-xiv., the Call given and accepted.

(*b*) Chapters xv., xvi., the Covenant made and received.

(*c*) Chapters xvii.-xxi., the Confirmation of the Covenant.

(*d*) Chapter xxii., the Crowning Event.

(*e*) Chapters xxiii.-xxv. 10, the Closing Years.

We now commence by studying the circumstances of his early days and the Divine call as recorded at the head of this chapter.

I. *Abraham's Early Life.*—Abraham lived at Ur of the Chaldees, usually identified with Mugheir, near the Persian Gulf. The coast-line, however, was at that time about one hundred and forty miles north of the present line. He comes of the line of Shem. His father was Terah (chap. xi. 24), and he had two brothers (chap. xi. 26). His wife was Sarai (chap. xi. 29), and she was childless (chap. xi. 30). Most probably Abraham was the youngest, not the eldest son, the names not being given in the order of their birth, but in the order of importance, since Abraham was God's chosen instrument. Similar circumstances are found in Gen. v. 32 with reference to Shem, Ham, and Japheth, and in Gen. x. 2, where Japheth comes first in the order of genealogy (*cf.* 1 Chron. i. 5, 8, 17). The analogy of God's I. Abraham's Early Life.

Gen. xi. 10 —xii. 9.

choice of the younger of the sons of Adam, Isaac, Joseph, Jesse, suggests the probability that Abraham was Terah's youngest son.

Abraham evidently belonged to a family of shepherds accustomed to move about as pasture was needed.

Either Terah or his ancestors were idolaters (Joshua xxiv. 2, 15). Four hundred years had elapsed since the Flood, and there had thus been time for the degeneration of the sons of Shem. Possibly Abraham himself may have been an idolater (*cf.* Isa. li. 1, 2).

II. The Divine Call.

II. *The Divine Call.*—A third start is made with humanity. Adam had failed, Noah's descendants had failed, and now another attempt was to be made. The former attempts were made with the race, but this one was made by means of an individual as the founder of a nation which should in turn bless the race. Abraham, as the founder of the Jewish nation, was intended by God as (*a*) a witness to him to the rest of mankind (Isa. xliv. 8), (*b*) a depository of God's revelation (Rom. iii. 2), (*c*) a preparation for the Messiah and Saviour (Isa. liii.), (*d*) a channel of blessing to the world (Rom. xv. 8-12).

The first call came at Ur of the Chaldees (Acts vii. 2-4). 'The God of Glory' called him. This unique title of God is very noteworthy. It was doubtless due to this call that Terah left Ur (Gen. xi. 31). Then came a second call to Haran after Terah's death (Gen. xii. 1). Some authorities consider Gen. xii. 1 to refer to the first call at Ur,

and this is why the Authorised Version and the Revised Version render the Hebrew words 'the Lord *had* said.' As, however, there is no pluperfect tense in the original, it seems better to regard Gen. xii. 1 as referring to the second call, especially in the light of Acts vii. 2-4. Gen. xi. 10 —xii. 9.

The Lord said, 'Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house.' These were very searching and pressing demands upon one who was the youngest son. Yet God's call to separation was a necessary condition of blessing. Separation was the keynote of Abraham's life from first to last, and in that separation to the will of God he found all his peace and blessing.

God never places burdens on His people's shoulders without giving them power to respond. 'God's biddings are His enablings.' He encouraged Abraham with a threefold promise: (*a*) A land (xii. 1), (*b*) a seed (xii. 2), (*c*) a world-wide blessing (xii. 3).

III. *The Human Response.*—Nothing is more striking than the immediate response made by Abraham. At the outset he manifests that faith which characterised him almost the whole of his life. The following aspects of his faith are worthy of consideration:— III. The Human Response.

The Confidence of Faith (ver. 4).—'So Abraham went, *as the Lord had spoken* unto him.' He took God at His word without hesitation and without questioning.

The Obedience of Faith (vers. 4-6).—In leaving Ur and staying at Haran his obedience was only

Gen. xi. 10 —xii. 9.

partial, whatever may have been the precise cause and explanation. Perhaps Terah lacked spiritual sympathy with Abraham, or else age and infirmity may have prevented him going further than Haran. In any case, Abraham did not obey fully until after his father's death. Then came entire and prompt obedience in his departure from Haran with all that he possessed. It is evident that the stay in Haran was a protracted one (ver. 5). The 'souls' refer to the persons of the slaves and other dependents.

The Influence of Faith (ver. 5).—Abraham's response to the Divine call evidently led Lot to join his uncle and journey to Canaan. There was no compulsion on Lot; he might have stayed where he was. The influence of Abraham's faith constrained him to go. True faith in God often inspires others and leads them to blessing.

The Confession of Faith (vers. 6, 7).—Abraham came to Sichem (Sychar, John iv.), the later Shechem. The 'oak' may be the 'terebinth,' or turpentine tree, whose leaf is very similar to that of the oak. 'Moreh' may be the name of the owner of the terebinth, or, according to some, it means a soothsayer, implying that under this tree the art of divination was practised among the Canaanites. In verse 7 we have the first visible appearance of God to man. Hitherto only the Divine voice had been heard. Now there was a manifestation of the Divine presence, probably in the form of the Angel of the Covenant (chap. xviii. 22; Josh. v. 13; Judges xiii. 3). To this revelation of God Abraham

at once responded by building an altar. This was his acceptance and acknowledgment of the Divine revelation, the revelation being thus followed by his personal response. At the same time the altar was a testimony to the Canaanites who were then in the land. Gen. xi. 10 —xii. 9.

The Endurance of Faith (vers. 8, 9).—Notwithstanding the promises of God, Abraham had to wait. He had no seed, though one had been promised; he had no abiding place, pitching his tent, not building a home; and the Canaanites in the land prevented him from possessing an inch of the country. All this was a renewed call to continued faith.

Suggestions for Meditation.

In this opening episode of Abraham's life we have clearly brought before us some of the most frequent experiences of the believer's early days.

1. *The Divine Call.*—To us also comes the call for absolute trust, the faith that takes God simply at His word, feeling assured that it cannot fail. Like Abraham, we are to trust in the dark (Heb. xi. 8).

2. *The Divine Claim.*—Separation is still the believer's duty. Sometimes it involves separation from dearest kindred, sometimes from congenial surroundings, and always from sin and self-will. Separation thus tests the reality of our life, and at the same time strengthens our spiritual fibres. 'The nearer to heaven the steeper the mountains.'

3. *The Divine Consecration.* — Abraham responded by building an altar and pitching his

Gen. xi. 10 —xii. 9.

tent in place after place. By the altar he confessed himself a worshipper and by the tent a stranger and a pilgrim. Thus was his life wholly surrendered to his God. The altar and the tent together sum up the believer's life.

4. *The Divine Cheer.* — How beautifully God meets those who respond wholly to Him. They are assured of His presence (xii. 7), of His promises (xii. 2, 3), of His power, and of His peace. No life has ever had any demand made upon it without receiving the Divine cheer and encouragement which enables the soul to abide in the Lord and go forward with joy and courage.

XV

THE TESTING

Gen. xii. 10—xiii. 4.

And there was a famine in the land: and Abram went down into Egypt to sojourn there; for the famine *was* grievous in the land.

And it came to pass, when he was come near to enter into Egypt, that he said unto Sarai his wife, Behold now, I know that thou *art* a fair woman to look upon:

Therefore it shall come to pass, when the Egyptians shall see thee, that they shall say, This *is* his wife: and they will kill me, but they will save thee alive.

Say, I pray thee, thou *art* my sister: that it may be well with me for thy sake; and my soul shall live because of thee.

And it came to pass, that, when Abram was come into Egypt, the Egyptians beheld the woman, that she *was* very fair.

The princes also of Pharaoh saw her, and commended her before Pharaoh: and the woman was taken into Pharaoh's house.

And he entreated Abram well for her sake: and he had sheep, and oxen, and he-asses, and men-servants, and maid-servants, and she-asses, and camels.

And the Lord plagued Pharaoh and his house with great plagues because of Sarai, Abram's wife.

And Pharaoh called Abram, and said, What *is* this *that* thou hast done unto me? why didst thou not tell me that she *was* thy wife?

Why saidst thou, She *is* my sister? so I might have taken her to me to wife: now therefore behold thy wife, take *her*, and go thy way.

And Pharaoh commanded *his* men concerning him: and they sent him away, and his wife, and all that he had.

And Abram went up out of Egypt, he, and his wife, and all that he had, and Lot with him, into the south.

And Abram *was* very rich in cattle, in silver, and in gold.

And he went on his journeys from the south even to Beth-el,

unto the place where his tent had been at the beginning, between Beth-el and Hai;

Unto the place of the altar, which he had made there at the first: and there Abram called on the name of the Lord.

Gen. xii. 10—xiii. 4.

THE young believer's life is soon tested, especially after seasons of communion (see 2 Chron. xxxii. 1, and xxxi. 20, 21, R.V.). It was so with the Apostle Peter (Matt. xvi. 17-23), and even with our Lord (Luke iii. 22, and iv. 1). We now see this great principle in the life of Abraham.

I. The Special Circumstances (ver. 10).

I. *The Special Circumstances* (ver. 10).—One of the frequent famines arose. As there was no artificial irrigation, Palestine necessarily depended on the annual rainfall and the heavy sea mist that came up from the Mediterranean at certain times of the year (the "dew" of the Old Testament).

This was a very real test to Abraham. Notwithstanding the recent revelation of God with all its promises (xii. 7), there was actually a famine in the land of promise. Doubtless Abraham remembered the rich alluvial plains of Mesopotamia and Syria. Thus he was soon tested, and his faithfulness put to the proof. We are sometimes apt to identify the peace and calm of outward circumstances with the peace arising from a consciousness of the Divine presence. It was to make this distinction clear that Abraham was tested.

II. The Long Journey (ver. 10).

II. *The Long Journey* (ver. 10).—This journey is the first point of contact between Israel as represented in Abraham and Egypt. We well know the baneful influence exercised in later ages. The famine was, of course, the sole cause of

Abraham's journey, and in itself the most obvious and natural thing for him to do. Gen. xii. 10—xiii. 4.

It was the 'natural' thing for him to do; but then Abraham's position was not merely natural, for he had supernatural relationships. The right way is not always the easiest, and the easiest is not always the right way. Difficulties do not necessarily indicate that we are out of the pathway of God's will. It would certainly seem that Abraham was now thinking solely of the land and its famine, and forgetting God and His promises.

III. *The Proposal* (vers. 11-13). — Abraham suggested that Sarai should say that she was his sister instead of his wife. This was a 'half-truth' (*cf.* xx. 12). Verbally it was correct; but really it was a lie. III. The Proposal (vers. 11-13).

It is to be observed, too, that the proposal was clearly actuated by selfishness; there was no regard for Sarai, but only for his own safety. How strange this is! He had journeyed all the way from Ur of the Chaldees, and yet could not trust God with his wife or with his own life. How small great people can be! How weak strong men can be! How bad good people can be!

IV. *The Result* (vers. 14-16).—What Abraham anticipated came to pass; Sarai was taken into the King's harem. Abraham's very precaution led to Pharaoh's action. IV. The Result (vers. 14-16).

The patriarch's life is thus saved, and gifts are showered upon him, doubtless as the recognised dowry on the marriage of his sister with Pharaoh. Yet what must have been his thoughts as he was

Gen. xii. 10—xiii. 4.

alone in his tent! He had gained his end, but at a very great cost to Sarai and himself. Thus Abraham fell at the point where he was supposed to be strongest—his faith. So it was with Moses, the meek man (Num. xx. 10).

V. The Divine Displeasure (ver. 17).

V. *The Divine Displeasure* (ver. 17).—Serious illness came upon Pharaoh and his house, showing them clearly that some extraordinary meaning was in it. God could not allow His promises to Abraham to be frustrated or His will unfulfilled. It was therefore necessary to save Abraham from himself and rescue Sarai.

VI. The Rebuke (vers. 18-20).

VI. *The Rebuke* (vers. 18-20).—We can picture Abraham's surprise at Pharaoh's expostulation. The Egyptians, with all their sins, seem to have laid great store by truth and abhorred all kinds of lying. The King thereupon ordered Abraham to take her and go out of the land, Pharaoh's servants being charged to see them both safely out of Egypt.

VII. The Restoration (vers. 1-4).

VII. *The Restoration* (vers. 1-4). — We can imagine Abraham's feelings as the caravan slowly wended its way out of Egypt, and as he came back to the land of Canaan. Note the phrase 'at the beginning' (ver. 3), and 'unto the place of the altar, which he had made there at the first' (ver. 4), and 'called on the name of the Lord' (ver. 4). We read of no such altar or prayer in Egypt. Abraham seems to have been out of communion there. Now, however, he does the only possible thing — he returns to where he had been at the commencement; he came back to the true surrender and simple worship of his earliest days in Canaan.

Whenever we backslide there is nothing else to do but to come back by the old gateway of genuine repentance and simple faith (Ps. xxiii. 3; 1 John i. 9).

Gen. xii. 10—xiii. 4.

Suggestions for Meditation.

A Believer's false step.—Abraham went aside out of the path of God's will; he was occupied with circumstances instead of with God. He only saw the famine, not the Divine faithfulness. 'He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool' (Prov. xxviii. 26). 'A crust with God is better than a feast without Him.'

2. *A Believer's definite backsliding.* — The possibilities of a true child of God wandering into sin and unfaithfulness are very clear from Scripture. This is one of the saddest and most mysterious facts of spiritual experience. In Abraham's case it manifested itself first in fear due to forgetfulness of God, then in selfishness, and lastly in hypocrisy and deceit. There is nothing more solemn than the well-known fact that through sin a believer can be out of touch with God for a long time.

3. *A Believer's sad experience.* — One part of this was the knowledge that his wrongdoing had brought ill effects on others. Both Sarai and Pharaoh's house suffered through Abraham's sin. Another element in his bitter cup was the plain rebuke from the heathen Pharaoh. We have truly touched the depths of spiritual unfaithfulness when a believer has to be openly rebuked by the ungodly.

Gen. xii. 10—xiii. 4.

4. *A Believer's only safeguard.*—This preservative is twofold—*trust* and *truth* every moment.

Abraham was taught three lessons about God in relation to *trust*: (1) That God was essential to his every step, and that nothing can be done apart from Him (John xv. 5); (2) that God was able—notwithstanding the famine God could have provided for Abraham; (3) that God was faithful: He had not forgotten His promises to His servant (xii. 1-3). Thus Abraham came back with a deepened idea of God and a louder call for simple, absolute, continual trust.

He was also taught the lesson of *truth*. The child of God is to be straightforward in all his attitude, and to go straight forward in all his actions. The end does *not* justify the means, whatever men may say. Even though our objects may be perfectly right, our means to attain those objects must be without blemish. This has special application to methods of Church work, ideas of social status, aspects of family life, and objects of personal ambition. Not only must the end we seek be true, the means we use must also be true.

XVI

THE SEPARATION

Gen. xiii. 5-18

And Lot also, which went with Abram, had flocks, and herds, and tents.

And the land was not able to bear them, that they might dwell together: for their substance was great, so that they could not dwell together.

And there was a strife between the herdmen of Abram's cattle, and the herdmen of Lot's cattle. And the Canaanite and the Perizzite dwelt then in the land.

And Abram said unto Lot, Let there be no strife, I pray thee, between me and thee, and between my herdmen and thy herdmen; for we *be* brethren.

Is not the whole land before thee? Separate thyself, I pray thee, from me: if *thou wilt take* the left hand, then I will go to the right; or if *thou depart* to the right hand, then I will go to the left.

And Lot lifted up his eyes, and beheld all the plain of Jordan, that it *was* well watered every where, before the Lord destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, *even* as the garden of the Lord, like the land of Egypt, as thou comest unto Zoar.

Then Lot chose him all the plain of Jordan; and Lot journeyed east: and they separated themselves the one from the other.

Abram dwelt in the land of Canaan, and Lot dwelt in the cities of the plain, and pitched *his* tent toward Sodom.

But the men of Sodom *were* wicked, and sinners before the Lord exceedingly.

And the Lord said unto Abram, after that Lot separated from him, Lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art northward, and southward, and eastward, and westward:

For all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever.

And I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth: so that if

a man can number the dust of the earth, *then* shall thy seed also be numbered.

Arise, walk through the land, in the length of it, and in the breadth of it: for I will give it unto thee.

Then Abram removed *his* tent, and came and dwelt in the plain of Mamre, which *is* in Hebron, and built there an altar unto the Lord.

Gen. xiii. 5-18.

GOD teaches His children new lessons at every step of life's pathway. We are now to gain a deeper insight into the reality of Abraham's life, as well as a fuller revelation of God's will concerning him.

I. A Serious Problem (vers. 5, 6).

I. *A Serious Problem* (vers. 5, 6).—Abraham and Lot were rich. The accessions which came to them in Egypt had increased their flocks and herds. This is the first instance of riches in the Bible (ver. 2), and we also have here the interesting problem of wealth connected with the believer's life. What is the teaching of Scripture about wealth as possessed by a child of God? A careful study of the entire Bible seems to show that there is no sin in being wealthy provided the riches have been honourably obtained, are regarded as belonging to God, and are being constantly used as in the sight of God. At the same time, wealth very seriously increases the responsibility of a believer, and his riches will soon become a sin if they are not used properly and with a sense of stewardship, not of ownership. Another experience of human life is seen in this story—the danger of quarrels between relatives on account of wealth. How often this deplorable fact has been experienced since Abraham's day!

The possession of such flocks and herds prevented

the uncle and nephew from continuing to dwell together. The need of increasing pasturage, together with the need of water, must have been very acute, and the problem was intensified by the presence of the Canaanites with their pastoral requirements. Gen. xiii. 5-18.

II. *A Deplorable Strife* (ver. 7).—The quarrel originated with the servants, and was limited to them. Doubtless each herdman endeavoured to gain the best locality for his own flocks. II. A Deplorable Strife (ver. 7).

Very significantly we read that 'The Canaanite and Perizzite dwelled then in the land.' This statement suggests not only the circumstance that accentuated the difficulty of obtaining pasturage, but also the fact that the heathen around must have seen and overheard this quarrel between the servants of God's children. Herein lay one of the saddest elements of the matter.

III. *A Generous Proposal* (vers. 8, 9).—Abraham takes the initiative, and begs that there shall be no strife. The quarrel might easily rise above the servants to the masters, and Abraham speaks in time to prevent this, urging as the great reason, 'We are brethren.' Notice his large-hearted suggestion. Although he is older than Lot and chief of the tribe or clan, and although the land had been promised by God to him, he allows his nephew the first choice. 'The servant of God must not strive' (2 Tim. ii. 24). How beautifully Abraham had recovered from his fall in Egypt! While there he had learned the great lesson that no one needs to descend to deceit in order to obtain his III. A Generous Proposal (vers. 8, 9).

Gen. xiii. 5-18.

desires. The true child of God can afford to be magnanimous, simply because he is a child of God.

IV. A Selfish Choice (vers. 10-13).

IV. *A Selfish Choice* (vers. 10-13).—Lot thereupon took the generous Abraham at his word, and, seeing that the plain of Jordan was 'well watered everywhere,' he chose that region, and departed thither. This was the sole reason that prompted his choice. He saw the great advantage to him and his possessions in that most fertile of regions.

The land was indeed fertile, but as he 'moved his tent as far as Sodom' (ver. 12, R.V.) it soon became evident what danger he was in. The material blessing was accompanied by moral blight. There are many modern counterparts to Lot's action; even professedly Christian people often choose their home in a locality simply for its scenery, or its society, or its other material advantages without once inquiring what Church privileges are there. The souls of their children may starve amid worldliness and polite indifference. The same disastrous choice is often made in connection with public schools, to which boys are sent simply for the position and reputation of the school, regardless of the moral and spiritual atmosphere of the institution. This was the great mistake of Lot's life, from which he ever afterwards suffered.

V. A Divine Revelation (vers. 14-17).

V. *A Divine Revelation* (vers. 14-17).—'After that Lot was separated from him.' Abraham was now alone, and perhaps in his solitude he began to wonder whether he had done right, or whether his

offer to Lot was due to weakness and the lack of true assertion of rights. There is often a temptation to reaction after a great moral decision has been made. Just at this time, then, and when he was alone, God came to him with Divine assurances and blessed compensation. Gen. xiii. 5-18.

The revelation of the Divine purposes was fuller than any that preceded it (*cf.* xii. 1 and 7). Notice its three aspects:—

(*a*) The prospect afforded (ver. 14). Lot had 'lifted up his eyes' (ver. 10), and with remarkable force and significant emphasis God says to Abraham, 'Lift up now *thine* eyes.' How different the action is in each case! Abraham's prospect was not only wider, but infinitely more glorious, because of the Word of God behind it.

(*b*) The promise given (vers. 15, 16). For the first time God promises the land to Abraham himself. 'To thee will I give it'; hitherto the land had only been promised to his seed (xii. 7). Let us ponder these wonderful promises. They are to be interpreted literally and spiritually. They are already having their primary fulfilment in the Church of Christ as Abraham's spiritual seed (Gal. iii. 7-9, 16), but there will surely be a literal fulfilment in the future to the Jewish nation (Rom. xi. 26-29).

(*c*) The possession enjoined (ver. 17). Abraham is to 'walk up and down,' and, as it were, appropriate and claim for himself in detail that which God gives (*cf.* Josh. i. 3). The promises of God are to be appropriated by faith, and it is thus

Gen. xiii. 5-18.

the purpose of God becomes realised in individual experience.

VI. A Prompt Response (ver. 18).

'Then Abraham moved his tent.' Immediately he responded to God and pitched his tent 'at Mamre, which is in Hebron.' Hebron means 'fellowship,' and we may spiritualise the thought by saying that prompt whole-hearted obedience always leads to fellowship with God.

'Built there an altar.' Again we see the real man in this simple, whole-hearted testimony to the Divine presence and promises. His tent and his altar indicate the pilgrim and devout life of the true child of God.

Suggestions for Meditation.

1. *Differences in Believers.*—What a contrast between Lot and Abraham! Except for 2 Peter ii. 7, 8, we should have hardly credited Lot with any vital religion. Although 'righteous,' he is yet living by sight, seeking only his own advantages and pleasure; worldliness is his dominant characteristic, his one thought is the well-watered plains. He is a type and illustration of the Christian who is not fully consecrated—one who is trying to make the best of both worlds, endeavouring to stand well with God, while pushing to the full his own earthly interests. Yet one part of his life must necessarily suffer; so it was with Lot, so it is always. Contrast Abraham with his large-heartedness of spirit, his simple acceptance of God's promises, his whole-hearted obedience to God's will, and his courageous testimony in the altar of worship. He is a type and illustration of the

consecrated believer, the one who puts God first, and to whom God's presence, God's will, God's way are everything. These differences in believers are as striking and as puzzling to-day as ever, yet they ought not to exist in the Church of Christ. Gen. xiii. 5-18.

2. *Differences between Believers.* — Even the children of God from time to time have their differences of opinion, which often lead to trouble and strife. If only they are met with magnanimity like Abraham's, they will soon be resolved. Note the New Testament emphasis on mutual submission (Eph. v. 21; 1 Peter v. 5). The Christian paradox of everybody submitting to everybody else would soon heal all dissensions between believers. Magnanimity in Abraham was the result of his faith in God. He could afford to be large-hearted because God was so real to him. Those who put God first will never be bereft of their just rights. God is pledged on their behalf (Prov. iii. 5, 6).

3. *Differences for Believers.*—The results in the lives of Lot and Abraham were vastly different. Lot obtained what he wanted, earthly prosperity, but spiritually it may be questioned whether he was ever happy after making that choice. There was no witness for God, no real blessing on his home, and in the end came spiritual and social disaster. Abraham's experience was very different; God became an increasing reality to him, there was a glory and power in his life, and we are sure that he never regretted his action in putting God

Gen. xiii. 5-18. first. God's children always experience His Divine favour and blessing in proportion to their faithfulness, and if we are inclined to question and seek for the reason of differences in the spiritual experiences of the children of God we may find them in the difference of response to God on the part of His followers.

XVII

A NEW EMERGENCY

Gen. xiv. 1-16

And it came to pass, in the days of Amraphel king of Shinar, Arioch king of Ellasar, Chedorlaomer king of Elam, and Tidal king of nations;

That these made war with Bera king of Sodom, and with Birsha king of Gomorrah, Shinab king of Admah, and Shemeber king of Zeboiim, and the king of Bela, which is Zoar.

All these were joined together in the vale of Siddim, which is the salt sea.

Twelve years they served Chedorlaomer, and in the thirteenth year they rebelled.

And in the fourteenth year came Chedorlaomer, and the kings that *were* with him, and smote the Rephaims in Ashteroth-Karnaim, and the Zuzims in Ham, and the Emims in Shaveh Kiriathaim.

And the Horites in their mount Seir, unto El-paran, which *is* by the wilderness.

And they returned, and came to Enmishpat, which *is* Kadesh, and smote all the country of the Amalekites, and also the Amorites, that dwelt in Hazezon-tamar.

And there went out the king of Sodom, and the king of Gomorrah, and the king of Admah, and the king of Zeboiim, and the king of Bela (the same *is* Zoar); and they joined battle with them in the vale of Siddim;

With Chedorlaomer the king of Elam, and with Tidal king of nations, and Amraphel king of Shinar, and Arioch king of Ellasar; four kings with five.

And the vale of Siddim *was full of* slime-pits: and the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah fled, and fell there: and they that remained fled to the mountain.

And they took all the goods of Sodom and Gomorrah, and all their victuals, and went their way.

And they took Lot, Abram's brother's son, who dwelt in Sodom, and his goods, and departed.

And there came one that had escaped, and told Abram the Hebrew: for he dwelt in the plain of Mamre the Amorite, brother of Eshcol, and brother of Aner: and these *were* confederate with Abram.

And when Abram heard that his brother was taken captive, he armed his trained *servants*, born in his own house, three hundred and eighteen, and pursued *them* unto Dan.

And he divided himself against them, he and his servants, by night, and smote them, and pursued them unto Hobah, which *is* on the left hand of Damascus.

And he brought back all the goods, and also brought again his brother Lot, and his goods, and the women also, and the people.

Gen. xiv. 1-16.

THE life of restful fellowship with God (xiii. 18) is now to be disturbed by a new emergency issuing in new experiences. Communion with God is constantly found to be the preparation for new crises in the believer's daily life.

I. The Great Battle (vers. 1-11).

I. *The Great Battle* (vers. 1-11).—Clearly we have here a contemporary record of the events described. Elam is seen to be supreme over Assyria and Babylon, and it was of the utmost importance to Elam to keep the Jordan valley free and open on account of the trade route to Egypt, with all that intercourse in commerce meant to those Eastern lands. Five kings of Eastern Palestine (ver. 2) had been subject to Chedorlaomer, the leader of the four kings of the East. Then came a rebellion on the part of the Palestine tributaries, followed by the expedition of Chedorlaomer and the kings that were with him (vers. 5-7). The vale of Siddim was the scene of the battle, with the result that the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah were entirely vanquished.

It is well known that up to quite recent years certain schools of modern criticism rejected this chapter as wholly unhistorical. The discovery of

tablets, however, has altered this view, and goes far towards demonstrating the essential historicity of the entire chapter. Chedorlaomer appears on the tablets as Kudur Lagamar and Amraphel as Hammurabi. The discovery of the code of Hammurabi during the last few years has given a further confirmation to the historical character of this chapter. (For a popular discussion on this subject, see Sayce's *Monument Facts and Higher Critical Fancies,* chapter iv.) Gen. xiv. 1-16.

II. *The Significant Capture* (ver. 12).—Among the captures from the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah was Lot, who was taken prisoner, and carried off to the East. It is evident that Lot had overlooked the fact that others besides himself were thoroughly aware of the fertility of that neighbourhood. It was not likely that he could expect to enjoy sole and unmolested possession of so advantageous a position. As he journeyed in the train of his captors we wonder what were his feelings, and whether he thought of his uncle Abraham in perfect safety, although only a few miles off. II. The Significant Capture (ver. 12).

How was it that Lot was taken captive, for we read only that he pitched his tent *towards* Sodom (xiii. 12)? It is evident that this did not satisfy him, for now we read that he dwelt *in* Sodom (xiv. 12). The consequences of this false step were as disastrous as they were thoroughly deserved. No godly man can ever deliberately dwell in Sodom with impunity.

An escaped prisoner came and told Abraham of what had happened, and for Abraham to hear that

Gen. xiv. 1-16.

'his brother was taken captive' was to decide at once on his rescue. How very touching are the words 'when Abraham heard that his brother was taken' (ver. 14). There is no root of bitterness here. He does not say 'It serves him right' or 'Let him alone.'

III. The Bold Undertaking (vers. 13, 14).

III. *The Bold Undertaking* (vers. 13, 14).—Abraham now appears before us in a new aspect, showing himself to be a man of thought and skill, and of bravery. There may also be a touch of patriotism in it in relation to Canaan, his adopted country. New emergencies call out new powers. Apart from these circumstances no one would have credited Abraham with these remarkable qualities. He arms his trained servants and sets off in pursuit, arriving quickly at the northern end of Palestine at Dan.

IV. The Complete Success (vers. 15, 16).

The pursuit extended to 120 miles, and by a bold stroke of strategy, dividing his servants into separate companies, he smote the enemy from different directions, and pursued them far beyond the limits of Palestine, and nearly as far north as Damascus. The prompt action, the skilful leadership, and the brave, determined attack are interesting revelations of this new side of Abraham's nature.

Abraham was entirely successful, for he rescued Lot and all his household, besides the recovery of the goods belonging to the kings of Sodom and Gomorrah. As they journeyed back, uncle and nephew, we again wonder what were Lot's thoughts. There is no record of any expression or even feeling of gratitude, and the fact that he deliberately went

back to Sodom is another illustration of the essential shallowness and worldliness of his mind in contrast to the magnanimity and genuine spirituality of Abraham. Gen. xiv. 1-16.

Suggestions for Meditation.

1. *Some elements of a godly life.*—Looking closely at the narrative we cannot fail to see in it some essential features and most beautiful aspects of the life of a child of God.

(*a*) His Sympathy. Abraham showed no resentment, but with utter unselfishness he at once desires and determines to set out to the rescue of Lot.

(*b*) His Decision. We generally associate godliness with the passive rather than the active virtues, but in view of Hebrews xi. we must not forget the two sides of the Christian life. In Gen. xiii. Abraham is seen manifesting the passive virtues of unselfishness, humility, and willingness to yield his rights. In chapter xiv., however, there is all the decision and initiative of the brave and fearless man. Courage is as real a Christian virtue as humility.

(*c*) His Capability. Abraham's strategy and skill show that he was "a man of parts." There is no necessary connection between godliness and incapacity. The Christian man should neither be a coward nor an incapable. The Spirit of God Who equipped Bezaleel (Exod. xxxi. 3) is able to give inventiveness, and intellectual and executive ability.

2. *The explanation of these elements.* — It is all summed up by 'faith in God.' 'By faith

Gen. xiv. 1-16. Abraham' was enabled to feel and show this sympathy, for the simple reason that God was all in all to him, and he could in the true sense afford to be tender-hearted and unselfish. 'By faith Abraham' possessed and manifested decision, because he was in constant touch with the Source of all power, and was strong in his God to attempt and do great things. 'By faith Abraham' was enabled to cultivate and reveal his capacity as a man of affairs because God is the God of all grace, and provides grace sufficient for all His servants in every emergency, and even when the believer's life commences with only a partial capability in certain directions, it is wonderful how grace can cultivate this faculty and enable the man to do wonders for God. Faith thus purifies and instructs the mind, softens and stirs the heart, and strengthens and controls the will. 'This is the victory . . . our faith.'

XVIII

THE TEST OF VICTORY

Gen. xiv. 17-24.

And the king of Sodom went out to meet him after his return from the slaughter of Chedorlaomer, and of the kings that *were* with him, at the valley of Shaveh, which *is* the king's dale.

And Melchizedek king of Salem brought forth bread and wine; and he *was* the priest of the most high God.

And he blessed him, and said, Blessed *be* Abram of the most high God, possessor of heaven and earth:

And blessed *be* the most high God, which hath delivered thine enemies into thy hand. And he gave him tithes of all.

And the king of Sodom said unto Abram, Give me the persons, and take the goods to thyself.

And Abram said to the king of Sodom, I have lift up mine hand unto the Lord, the most high God, the possessor of heaven and earth,

That I will not *take* from a thread even to a shoelatchet, and that I will not take any thing that *is* thine, lest thou shouldest say, I have made Abram rich;

Save only that which the young men have eaten, and the portion of the men which went with me, Aner, Eshcol, and Mamre; let them take their portion.

THE crowning hour of success is a good test of character. If 'sweet are the uses of adversity,' equally valuable in other directions are the uses of prosperity. How a man behaves at the moment of victory often affords a supreme revelation of character and spiritual power. We shall

Gen. xiv. 17-24.

Gen. xiv. 17-24.

see this in the case of Abraham as we study his interview with the two kings.

I. The Royal Recognition (vers. 17, 18).

I. *The Royal Recognition* (vers. 17, 18).—Gratitude alone would suffice to prompt the king of Sodom to go out to meet Abraham after his return from the slaughter of the kings who had caused such havoc to Sodom and Gomorrah. The meeting was the natural and fitting recognition of the great services rendered.

The other king (of Salem) who met the victorious patriarch was a very different personage, and in his capacity as priest of the Most High God brought forth bread and wine to greet the conqueror of the enemies of his country. It was another new experience to Abraham to be met by two kings and to be acknowledged by them before all their retinue as the saviour of their country.

II. The Priestly Benediction (vers. 18-20).

II. *The Priestly Benediction* (vers. 18-20). — Who is this personage suddenly entering patriarchal history? He seems to have been one of the faithful few; one of those who still retained the purity of their allegiance to the one true God. He was a link with the past age of Shem, and amidst the surrounding departure from God still witnessed to the reality of the Divine presence and its claim upon men. The title of God is very noteworthy, 'God Most High' (Hebrew, *El Elyon*). This title is very rare in the Old Testament, though it is found no less than four times in the verses now before us. The idea underlying it is that of God as the Supreme Being who is above all local deities. We have its New

Testament equivalent in 'the Highest' (Luke i. 32, 35), and 'the Most High God' (Acts xvi. 17). Melchizedek was 'a priest of God Most High,' and the root idea of priesthood is access into God's presence and the representation of man to God (Heb. v. 1). His typical character will come before us at a later stage. Gen. xiv. 17-24.

We are told very distinctly that Melchizedek blessed Abraham and prayed the blessing of God Most High upon him, at the same time blessing God for the deliverance of Abraham. This solitary figure of the king thus standing between God and Abraham is very striking, and shows that true religion was still possible and actual outside the Abrahamic relation to God. The twofold blessing of Abraham and of God is also to be noted. When God blesses us it is a blessing in *deed*, a benefaction. When man blesses God it can of necessity only be a blessing in *word*, a benediction. Here we have both.

III. *The Loyal Acknowledgment* (ver. 20).—Abraham's attitude of immediate willingness to receive blessing is a striking testimony to his consciousness of the spiritual position and power of Melchizedek. This Divine blessing was received before his spiritual testing in the interview with the king of Sodom, and doubtless played its part in preparing him. III. The Loyal Acknowledgment (ver. 20).

Abraham further acknowledged the position of the king of Salem by giving him tithes of all that he possessed. This reference to tithing is exceedingly interesting as suggesting the pre-Mosaic observance of this acknowledgment of God's claim on our gifts.

Gen. xiv. 17-24.

If the principle of tithing was thus previous to the Mosaic economy there seems no reason to deny its essential fitness to-day in the economy of grace; the tenth being regarded as God's absolute right before any question arises about free-will offerings and other spontaneous gifts of the redeemed and grateful life.

IV. The Natural Proposal (ver. 21).

IV. *The Natural Proposal* (ver. 21).—It was natural and inevitable that the king of Sodom should forthwith acknowledge his indebtedness to Abraham. The patriarch was now a great man in the eyes of the king, and it was the monarch's obvious duty to show his gratitude and appreciation of Abraham's great services. He proposed to Abraham the retention of the goods rescued from the Eastern kings, and that the men and women of Sodom should be handed over to their rightful sovereign. This was a natural and customary method of dividing the spoil after a victory, and from the point of view of existing usage it was as natural for the king to make the proposal as it would have been simply natural for Abraham to accept it. But Abraham had other than 'natural' principles to guide him.

V. The Noble Refusal (vers. 22-24).

V. *The Noble Refusal* (vers. 22-24).—He would not take anything, even the smallest gift. He had not entered upon the expedition for his own advantage, and consequently there was now no question about the spoil.

It would seem from the words, 'I have lift up mine hand unto the Lord,' that Abraham had anticipated the possibility of this or some similar

proposal and had provided beforehand for it. Having thus faced the matter quietly before God, he was able to decide at once as to his course of action. It is always of great spiritual value, whenever the opportunity is afforded us, to face probable contingencies beforehand, and decide in the sight of God what we shall do if and when the event takes place. Gen. xiv. 17-24.

'Lest thou shouldest say, I have made Abraham rich.' His position in the sight of God was such that he could not endure the thought of being in any way dependent upon the king of Sodom. It is often found that when men rise in the world there are others who are only too ready to boast of the way in which they have helped these men in their upward progress. Very often this boasting is as natural as it is allowable, but it has its limits in any case, and sometimes it is very easily exaggerated. In Abraham's case help from the king of Sodom would have been help from a quarter to which he did not desire to be indebted. The worldliness of his nephew Lot had already shown the spiritual dangers of intimacy with Sodom.

The only qualification that Abraham makes is with reference to the Canaanitish young men who had assisted him in the victory, and who naturally would not be guided by the principles that actuated him. On their behalf he is willing to receive some of the spoil. Spirituality is thus able to discern and distinguish between circumstances when we are called upon to act for self and on behalf of others.

Gen. xiv. 17-24. Suggestions for Meditation.

1. *The contrast of Abraham's attitude to the two kings.*—How very remarkable is this difference! To the king of Salem the acknowledgment of dependence; to the king of Sodom the assertion of independence. To the king of Salem the admission of inferiority; to the king of Sodom the attitude of equality. To the king of Salem the spirit of humility; to the king of Sodom the attitude of dignity. How striking and really wonderful is this perfect balance of qualities!

2. *The explanation of this striking attitude.*—Again we have to penetrate below the surface to discover the secret of Abraham's wonderful bearing. The explanation, of course, is 'faith,' and as we study the subject somewhat more closely we find a fourfold action and activity of Abraham's trust in God.

(*a*) Faith is able to recognise spiritual position. Melchizedek was God's representative, and Abraham's faith was quick to see this and to act accordingly.

(*b*) Faith is able to realise serious peril. Not always has a believer been able to see that success often means temptation, and victory the possibility of danger. Abraham saw this, and hence his unflinching attitude.

(*c*) Faith is able to resist strong pressure. It takes a real man to withstand honour paid by a king. 'By faith' Abraham endured as seeing the King of kings.

(*d*) Faith is able to rest on special provision. The offer of the spoil was as nothing to Abraham

compared with God's promise of the land and the attendant blessings. Thus Abraham could wait, and his faith expressed itself in patience, as he put God first. 'In all thy ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct thy paths.' Gen. xiv. 17-24.

XIX

THE GREAT ENCOURAGEMENT

Gen. xv. 1-6

After these things the word of the Lord came unto Abram in a vision, saying, Fear not, Abram: I *am* thy shield *and* thy exceeding great reward.

And Abram said, Lord God, what wilt Thou give me, seeing I go childless, and the steward of my house *is* this Eliezer of Damascus?

And Abram said, Behold, to me thou hast given no seed: and, lo, one born in my house is mine heir.

And, behold, the word of the Lord *came* unto him, saying, This shall not be thine heir; but he that shall come forth out of thine own bowels shall be thine heir.

And He brought him forth abroad, and said, Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them: and He said unto him, So shall thy seed be.

And he believed in the Lord; and He counted it to him for righteousness.

Gen. xv. 1-6.

TIMES of spiritual reaction are not uncommon among the people of God. Elijah experienced a great reaction (1 Kings xix.) after the eventful and critical day on Carmel (1 Kings xviii.) So it evidently was with Abraham. The new, remarkable, and in some respects exciting events connected with the rescue of Lot brought about the inevitable swing of the pendulum, as we can easily see in studying this chapter, which is closely connected with the preceding one.

I. *The Divine Revelation* (ver. 1). — There were nine successive manifestations of God to Abraham, of which this is the fifth. The phrase 'the word of the Lord came' is very noteworthy as occurring first in this passage. It is found frequently afterwards throughout the Old Testament. (*Cf.* Exod. ix. 20; 1 Sam. iii. 1.) The revelation seems to have been in the form of a vision, not a dream (ver. 5).

When did it come? 'After these things.' The reference is, of course, to the events of chapter xiv., and shows the direct and essential connection between the two chapters. God's revelations to His people are always intimately connected with their needs, as we see in this case.

Why did it come? 'Fear not, Abraham.' Then Abraham must have had some fear. What was this? Was it not a natural dejection after victory? May it not have been caused by inevitable physical, mental, and moral reaction after the strain involved in the recent events? Fear before battle is the characteristic of cowards; fear after battle is the mark of a hero. This is the first occurrence of the Divine 'Fear not' which is afterwards found so often as God's message to His weary and tried servants. Either 'Fear not,' or its equivalent 'Be not afraid,' occurs some eighty-four times in Holy Scripture. The silence of six centuries after Malachi was broken by the Divine 'Fear not' (Luke i. 13), and the announcement of the Incarnation was made in the same way (Luke i. 30).

Gen. xv. 1-6.

What was it? 'I am thy shield and thy exceeding great reward.' How appropriate to the need of the moment was this twofold revelation of God to His servant! (*a*) God as a shield against all foes. (*Cf.* Psalm iii. 3; xviii. 2; xviii. 30; lxxxiv. 9; xci. 4.) (*b*) God as a reward after victory. Abraham had refused the spoil of Sodom and Gomorrah; but God would not allow Abraham to be a loser. He Himself would be His servant's 'exceeding great reward.'

II. The Human Response (vers. 2-3).

II. *The Human Response* (vers. 2-3).—Notice his despondent inquiry. 'What wilt Thou give me?' It is evident from this inquiry how overstrained Abraham was. The long waiting and the spiritual loneliness had been making their mark, and now he almost complains as he asks what reward there can be for him.

Mark his disappointed hope. 'Seeing I go childless.' Ten years had elapsed since his entrance into Canaan, and, in spite of the promise of a seed, there was no sign of fulfilment. Sarah and he were so much older, and everything seemed against even the possibility of the realisation of God's promises.

Observe his discouraging prospect. 'One born in my house is mine heir.' Abraham seems to have almost lost hope, and was settling down to the conviction that, after all, his steward would be his heir.

III. The Divine Assurance (vers. 4-5).

III. *The Divine Assurance* (vers. 4, 5).—Now we shall see how God dealt lovingly and faithfully with His tried and troubled servant.

His faithlessness was corrected. 'This shall not be thine heir.' God had not forgotten to be gracious. He was still mindful of His promises (Gen. xii. 7, and xiii. 16). Gen. xv. 1-6.

His faith was instructed. 'He that shall come . . . shall be thine heir.' Thus God particularised in a way that had not been done previously in connection with the promise, and taught His servant, by giving him new ground for trust.

His faith was encouraged. 'Tell the stars . . . so shall thy seed be.' Abraham was bidden to look toward heaven, and in so doing he would doubtless realise something of the wide sweep of God's purposes for him and his seed. Notice the three metaphors connected with Abraham's seed: 'The dust of the earth' (Gen. xiii. 16); 'the stars of heaven' (Gen. xv. 5); 'the sand of the seashore' (Gen. xxii. 17).

IV. *The Human Acceptance* (ver. 6). — Now comes a wonderful change and a definite progress upwards in Abraham's spiritual experience. IV. The Human Acceptance (ver. 6).

There was a prompt response to the Divine revelation. 'Abraham believed.' He had faith before, but now it was prominent and emphatic, a clearer, stronger, fuller trust in God. The original Hebrew for 'believed' comes from a root whence we derive our 'Amen,' and we might paraphrase it by saying that 'Abraham said Amen to the Lord.' 'Amen' in Scripture never means a petition ('May it be so'), but is always a strong assertion of faith ('It shall be so,' or 'It is so'). Faith is thus the only, as it is the adequate, response to

Gen. xv. 1-6. God's revelation. The word of the Lord comes, and we believe. Faith takes God at His word.

Then came an equally prompt rejoinder from God in answer to His servant's trust. 'And He counted it to him.' That is, God accounted Abraham's faith as the channel for the reception of the gift of righteousness. Notice the Old Testament allusions to the doctrine of imputation, or reckoning (Lev. vii. 18; xvii. 4; Num. xviii. 27; 2 Sam. xix. 19; Psalm xxxii. 2; cvi. 31. (See also Rom. iv. *passim.*)

The spiritual result is described in one significant word, 'righteousness.' This means the state or condition of being 'right' with God, and we have here the first reference to this great word 'righteousness' which is subsequently so characteristic of the Old Testament as well as the New Testament revelation. Abraham was originally destitute of righteousness, and is now reckoned as righteous through faith in God. God Himself is the Object of his faith, the Word of God is the ground of his faith, and righteousness is the result of his faith. It is to be noticed that the phrase 'counted it to him *for* righteousness' is not to be confused with 'counted it to him *instead of* righteousness.' It means counted or reckoned with a view to his receiving righteousness. In Rom. iv. the preposition εἰς (for, unto) with 'righteousness' cannot be equivalent to ὡς (as if) or ἀντί (instead of). (See Haldane *in loc.*)

This passage is noteworthy for its first occurrences of remarkable and subsequently well-known

words and phrases: (1) 'The word of the Lord came'; (2) 'Fear not'; (3) 'Believed'; (4) 'Counted'; (5) 'Righteousness.' It is hardly too much to say that all subsequent occurrences of these words and phrases find the key to their meaning here. Gen. xv. 1-6.

Suggestions for Meditation.

1. *The Possibility of spiritual despondency.*— This is a well-known fact in the life of the believer. It is often due to a threefold strain which is partly physical, partly emotional, and partly spiritual. Great experiences make their mark upon us, and 'by reason of the frailty of our nature we cannot always stand upright.' At any rate we *do* not.

2. *The Peril of spiritual disheartenment.*—We may explain, but we can hardly excuse, spiritual depression, and it is often used of Satan to lead us away from God into the paths of spiritual despair. And even though we never reach despair, our depression may easily bring discredit upon the name of God. Herein lies one of the most serious elements of the peril.

3. *The Protection against spiritual discouragement.*—This is found first in God's continuous revelation of Himself to our hearts, and then our continued response in whole-hearted trust and confidence maintained through prayer and fellowship with the Word of God. God's truth and our trust. His grace and our faith. These are correlative facts and will ever protect the soul.

4. *The Preciousness of spiritual discipline.*— God's delays to Abraham were not denials. They

Gen. xv. 1-6.

were intended to bring him nearer to God and to lead him to depend more upon the Giver than on His gifts. Not what God gives so much as what He is, is the foundation and source of spiritual life, power and progress.

XX

THE CONFIRMATION OF FAITH

Gen. xv. 7-21

And He said unto him, I *am* the Lord that brought thee out of Ur of the Chaldees, to give thee this land to inherit it.

And he said, Lord God, whereby shall I know that I shall inherit it?

And He said unto him, Take Me an heifer of three years old, and a she-goat of three years old, and a ram of three years old, and a turtle-dove, and a young pigeon.

And he took unto Him all these, and divided them in the midst, and laid each piece one against another: but the birds divided he not.

And when the fowls came down upon the carcases, Abram drove them away.

And when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram; and, lo, an horror of great darkness fell upon him.

And He said unto Abram, Know of a surety, that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land *that is* not theirs, and shall serve them; and they shall afflict them four hundred years:

And also that nation, whom they shall serve, will I judge; and afterward shall they come out with great substance.

And thou shalt go to thy fathers in peace; thou shalt be buried in a good old age.

But in the fourth generation they shall come hither again: for the iniquity of the Amorites *is* not yet full.

And it came to pass, that, when the sun went down, and it was dark, behold a smoking furnace, and a burning lamp that passed between those pieces.

In that same day the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying, Unto thy seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates:

The Kenites, and the Kenizzites, and the Kadmonites,

And the Hittites, and the Perizzites, and the Rephaims,

And the Amorites, and the Canaanites, and the Girgashites, and the Jebusites.

Gen. xv. 7-21.

IN response to Abraham's faith (ver. 6) God entered into solemn covenant with him, assuring him of the certainty, while revealing still more of the meaning, of the Divine promises concerning him and his seed. In this section 'covenant' is the key-word.

I. The Foundation of the Covenant (ver. 7).

I. *The Foundation of the Covenant* (ver. 7).—At the basis of the covenant was God's character and revelation to Abraham, and on this foundation everything else rested.

The covenant was introduced by the solemn announcement of the Divine Name, 'I am Jehovah.' This was the bed-rock of all; God's unchanging and unchangeable presence and character.

Then came the significant reminder of what God had already done for him. 'That brought thee out of Ur of the Chaldees.' Abraham had already been redeemed, and this fact was the foundation of, and was intended to be a factor in, the rest of God's dealings with him.

Following this came the renewed declaration of the Divine purpose. 'To give thee this land to inherit it.' God again reminds and assures Abraham of His object in bringing him out of his own land. The purpose is once more stated clearly and plainly.

II. The Desire for the Covenant (ver. 8).

II. *The Desire for the Covenant* (ver. 8).—Abraham met this new assurance of God with an earnest desire for a proof.

He makes his appeal for knowledge. This was what he needed; knowledge, certitude.

He also sought from God some assurance. 'Whereby shall I know.' He desired some outward and visible guarantee and pledge.

Gen. xv. 7-21.

And yet it must be observed that he did not require a sign in order to believe, but after and on account of believing. It was not faithlessness, but a desire for confirmation. He fully believed God's Word, and yet wondered how and when it would be fulfilled. Contrast Mary's attitude (Luke i. 34) with that of Zacharias (Luke i. 18), though her words were practically the same. Abraham's attitude might well be summed up and illustrated by the words, 'Lord, I believe; help Thou mine unbelief' (Mark ix. 24).

III. The Preparation for the Covenant (vers. 9-10).

III. *The Preparation for the Covenant* (vers. 9-10).—The Divine instructions are now given. 'Take for Me an heifer,' etc. The heifer, goat, and ram were to be three years old, signifying maturity in the offering. These, with the dove and pigeon, were afterwards found associated with the Mosaic law (Exod. xxix. 15; Num. xv. 27, xix. 2; Deut. xxi. 3).

Then Abraham proceeded to fulfil the requirements connected with the solemnities of a covenant. 'Took . . . divided.' See Leviticus i. 6. Having divided the animals, he places the corresponding pieces opposite to each other, and the one bird opposite to the other, leaving a passage between. This was the usual form of agreement and contract, the two parties walking in procession along the pathway just made, and thereby signifying their agreement (Jer. xxxiv. 18 *f.*). The idea underlying this was that of a covenant by means of sacrifice (Ps. l. 5). The blood-covenant was a well-known primitive method of ratifying solemn agreements.

Gen. xv. 7-21.

We are now able to notice how Abraham prepared to receive God's assurance and further revelation.

IV. The Readiness for the Covenant (vers. 11, 12).

IV. *The Readiness for the Covenant* (vers. 11, 12).—Faithfulness was the first and leading proof of Abraham's readiness. He had obeyed exactly according to the command of God, observing to the letter what God required. This is ever the true attitude for fuller teaching and deeper blessing.

Watchfulness was another feature of his attitude at this time. While waiting God's time he kept guard over the carcases, and kept away the birds of prey. We see how spiritual attitude underlies this act.

Nor are we wrong in thinking that receptiveness characterised him. The supernatural slumber (*cf.* Gen. ii. 21) prepared Abraham for the reception of God's revelation by detaching him from all things earthly which might divert his attention, and prevent the full teaching having its effect upon his life. The dread that fell upon him was doubtless due to the consciousness of a Divine presence overshadowing him.

V. The Message of the Covenant (vers. 13-16).

V. *The Message of the Covenant* (vers. 13-16).—A fourfold revelation now comes from God, and Abraham is told of remarkable experiences which should accrue to his seed.

His seed is to endure great privation (ver. 13). Exile, bondage, and affliction are the three elements of this privation. He was to learn the meaning of heirship through suffering. (*Cf.* Rom. viii. 17.)

N.B.—The term of 400 years seems to be a round number for 430 (Exod. xii. 40; Acts vii. 6;

Gal. iii. 17). The 430 years may date from the birth of Isaac or from the death of Jacob, according to the computation chosen. Gen. xv. 7-21.

His seed is to witness the display of great power (ver. 14). The nation that would cause trouble to his seed would be punished, and his seed should come forth with abundant provision by God's help.

He himself is to experience great peace (ver. 15). This is the first hint that Abraham himself was not to realise personally the fulness of God's purpose. God leads us step by step without revealing everything at once; and as revelation after revelation came to Abraham the horizon of God's purpose extended wider and wider. Abraham is to die in peace and be buried in a good old age. He is to be gathered 'to his fathers'—which means, as they were not buried in Canaan, that he would be with them in Sheol.

And he is called to exercise great patience (ver. 16). Another hint of the wide sweep of the Divine purposes. Other factors were at work, and many conditions had to be fulfilled before God's purpose could be completely realised.

VI. *The Making of the Covenant* (vers. 17-21). —After the revelation of God's will comes the Divine assurance in the form of a covenant. VI. The Making of the Covenant (vers. 17-21).

The symbolical action is noteworthy (ver. 17). A cylindrical fire-pot and a fiery torch combined to symbolise and express the Divine presence (Exod. xix.), and in condescension to Abraham and his experience this symbol of the Divine presence passed along the pathway made between

Gen. xv. 7-21.

the birds and the animals, thus ratifying the covenant and giving God's servant a Divine guarantee.

Then comes a special assurance (vers. 18-21). God now reveals to His servant the precise limits of the land promised to him. It seems pretty clear that the two rivers referred to must be the Nile and the Euphrates, thus giving those complete boundaries of the Holy Land which have never yet been fully realised. (*Cf.* 1 Kings iv. 21; 2 Chron. ix. 26.) God's promises still await their perfect fulfilment, for His covenant with Abraham is absolutely unconditional, and will be realised in His own time.

Suggestions for Meditation.

The study of the Divine covenants of the Bible is full of the profoundest interest: (1) With Noah, (2) with Abraham, (3) with Moses and Israel, (4) the New Covenant. Each has its own characteristic features and elements; and only one, the Mosaic, is conditional, a covenant of works. The other three are covenants 'all of grace.' Consider now the meaning and message of this Covenant.

1. *The Divine Action.*—It is noteworthy that God only passed through the pieces, and not Abraham as well. This clearly shows that a Divine covenant is not a mutual agreement on equal terms between two parties, but a Divine promise assured and ratified by means of a visible pledge of its fulfilment. This at once takes the Divine covenant out of the category of all similar

human agreements. It is divinely one-sided. God promises, God gives, God assures (Heb. vi. 17). Gen. xv. 7-21.

2. *The Human Attitude.*—What, then, is man's part in this covenant? Simply that of a recipient. God gives; Abraham takes. 'What shall I *render* unto the Lord? . . . I will *take*' (Ps. cxvi. 12, 13). The attitude of the believer in response to this covenant of grace is fourfold: (1) A feeling of deep gratitude, (2) a response of whole-hearted trust, (3) an expression of hearty thanksgiving, (4) a life of loyal obedience.

XXI

A FALSE STEP

Gen. xvi.

Now Sarai, Abram's wife, bare him no children: and she had an handmaid, an Egyptian, whose name *was* Hagar.

And Sarai said unto Abram, Behold now, the Lord hath restrained me from bearing: I pray thee, go in unto my maid; it may be that I may obtain children by her. And Abram hearkened to the voice of Sarai.

And Sarai, Abram's wife, took Hagar her maid, the Egyptian, after Abram had dwelt ten years in the land of Canaan, and gave her to her husband Abram to be his wife.

And he went in unto Hagar, and she conceived: and when she saw that she had conceived, her mistress was despised in her eyes.

And Sarai said unto Abram, My wrong *be* upon thee: I have given my maid into thy bosom; and when she saw that she had conceived, I was despised in her eyes: the Lord judge between me and thee.

But Abram said unto Sarai, Behold, thy maid *is* in thy hand: do to her as it pleaseth thee. And when Sarai dealt hardly with her, she fled from her face.

And the angel of the Lord found her by a fountain of water in the wilderness, by the fountain in the way to Shur.

And he said, Hagar, Sarai's maid, whence camest thou? and whither wilt thou go? And she said, I flee from the face of my mistress Sarai.

And the angel of the Lord said unto her, Return to thy mistress, and submit thyself under her hands.

And the angel of the Lord said unto her, I will multiply thy seed exceedingly, that it shall not be numbered for multitude.

And the angel of the Lord said unto her, Behold, thou *art* with child, and shalt bear a son, and shalt call his name Ishmael; because the Lord hath heard thy affliction.

And he will be a wild man; his hand *will be* against every

man, and every man's hand against him: and he shall dwell in the presence of all his brethren.

And she called the name of the Lord that spake unto her, Thou God seest me: for she said, Have I also here looked after him that seeth me?

Wherefore the well was called Beer-lahai-roi; behold, *it is* between Kadesh and Bered.

And Hagar bare Abram a son: and Abram called his son's name, which Hagar bare, Ishmael.

And Abram *was* fourscore and six years old when Hagar bare Ishmael to Abram.

IT might have been thought that after the experience recorded in chapter xv. Abraham would have been enabled to continue along the pathway of God's will without hesitation, mistake, or trouble. But we know by our own experience the proneness of the believer to blunder and fall into error and sin all through his earthly pilgrimage, no matter how far advanced his course or mature his experience. In the story of Hagar we come upon the record of another shadow which fell on Abraham's life. He is brought face to face with a specious temptation, and for lack of spiritual perception he falls into the snare, which leads to serious and very far-reaching consequences. Gen. xvi.

I. *The Sad Mistake* (vers. 1-3).—The temptation came originally from Sarah. Waiting had evidently told upon her, and this action was the result. Yet we must not overlook the fact that Abraham yielded even though the first suggestion came from his wife. I. The Sad Mistake (vers. 1-3).

It had not yet been clearly revealed that Sarah was to be the mother of the promised seed, and probably this led to her impatience. Hagar, as bond-slave, was her mistress's personal property, 'a living chattel,' and any child of the bond-slave

Gen. xvi.

would necessarily belong to the mistress, not the mother.

There was evident faith in God's promise in this proposal of Sarah's. She fully believed that Abraham was to have the seed promised by God. We can therefore understand that her suggestion meant a very genuine piece of self-denial. The practice was a common one, and Sarah was but the creature of her age in urging it on Abraham.

Nevertheless, though Sarah's motive was good, genuine, and involved self-sacrifice, the proposal was wrong in itself, and, at the same time, wrong in its method of obtaining the end sought. It was wrong against God, Whose word had been given and Whose time should have been waited. It was wrong against Abraham, leading him out of the pathway of patient waiting for God's will. It was wrong against Hagar, and did not recognise her individuality and rights in the matter. It was wrong against Sarah herself, robbing her of a high privilege as well as leading to disobedience.

II. The Sorrowful Results (vers. 4-6).

II. *The Sorrowful Results* (vers. 4-6).—The outcome of Abraham's yielding was soon seen in the effects which came upon all.

The first effect was pride (ver. 4). Hagar's insolence was perfectly natural, and her reproach of her mistress, even though insolent, quite inevitable. Human nature is always human nature, and this reproach stung Sarah's pride to the quick, with the results that are well known.

The next result was jealousy (ver. 5). Now Sarah blames Abraham, a somewhat curious and

very unfair attitude. 'My wrong be upon thee.' Gen. xvi. This may be interpreted, 'My injury belongs to thee as well,' or, 'May the injury to me return to thee!' It is a little surprising that Sarah's quick womanly perception did not forewarn her of these results of pride and jealousy.

Then followed misery (ver. 6). This came upon Abraham with real force. He was, of course, powerless in the matter, as Hagar was her mistress's absolute property. He could not interfere, and was compelled to accept the inevitable, and say that Sarah must do 'as it pleased' her.

And not least was the injustice (ver. 6). This came upon Hagar, with whom Sarah 'dealt hardly.' Hagar found herself once more a slave, and this time with personal maltreatment such as she had never experienced before.

It is easy for us to see as we read the story how inevitable these results were. Would that we ourselves realised beforehand all such inevitableness!

III. *The Special Interposition* (vers. 7-12).—What a picture of real life is found in this chapter! Man is seen blundering, sinning, and suffering, and then God intervenes with His overruling providence, wisdom, and grace. III. The Special Interposition (vers. 7-12).

We see the blessed truth of Divine interest in human troubles (ver. 7). 'The angel found her.' God had not overlooked what had taken place, and now He interposes in order to bring about the best possible results after the error and sin of His children. How often God has had to do this for His children since that day!

Gen. xvi. We observe, too, the Divine call for perfect submission (vers. 8, 9). The questions 'whence' and 'whither' recall Hagar to her position, and the slave woman tells the simple truth about her flight. The Divine command is that she should return and submit herself. It will be noticed that the quasi-marriage is not for an instant acknowledged. Sarah is still Hagar's mistress. This call for submission was the first step towards blessing in Hagar's life. The same is true to-day. If we have made mistakes which have led us into sin, the primary condition of restoration is complete submission to the will of God, whatever that may involve.

We have also the Divine assurance of definite blessing (ver. 10). God accompanies His call for submission by the promise of blessing to her child. He never makes a demand without giving us a promise. Thus He encouraged and incited her to the very submission from which she doubtless shrank.

And above all there is the Divine revelation of overruling providence (vers. 11, 12). God told her that she should have a son and also of his name and its meaning (Ishmael; 'God shall hear'). Thus every time she mentioned his name she might be reminded of God's promises. Her son's character and relation to others were also revealed (ver. 12), an additional encouragement to the poor creature in her misery and trouble.

This interposition had its immediate and blessed effect on Hagar.

It led to a realisation of the Divine presence (ver. 13.) 'She called the name. . . . Thou God seest me,' or 'The God of my vision.' The Divine Presence thus came into her life with its blessing and cheer. **Gen. xvi.**

It prompted a memorial of the Divine promise (ver. 14). 'The well was called Beer-lahai-roi.' See margin, 'The well of Him that liveth and seeth me'; that is, the well where life is preserved after seeing God.

It elicited obedience to the Divine will. She returned to her mistress, accepted the position, and all things were fulfilled according to the Divine revelation.

Suggestions for Meditation.

1. *The continuance of the old nature.*—How truly this fact of the spiritual life is proved by this chapter! Is it not also manifest in daily experience? The most deeply-taught believer is not exempt from the temptations, weaknesses, and tendencies of the old sinful nature.

2. *The occurrence of special dangers.*—Here again we are face to face with a well-known fact of the spiritual life. Our life may be lived for days, and weeks, and months without anything exceptional occurring, and then suddenly a special temptation may arise which leads us into sin.

3. *The unexpected sources of temptation.*—Abraham's temptation came from the nearest and dearest in his life, the very source whence trouble might have been least expected. So it often is to-day. Satan uses even the holiest of relation-

Gen. xvi. ships and the closest of ties to bring about sin, and we ought not to be 'ignorant of his devices.'

4. *The combination of high motives and wrong actions.*—Sarah's motives were undoubtedly good, and we may fully believe that Abraham was actuated in the same way, and yet their actions were manifestly wrong. How frequently this remarkable combination of good motive and bad conduct occurs in history and daily life! The end does *not* justify the means, whatever people may say.

5. *The far-reaching effects of a believer's sin.*—Evil-doing on the part of a child of God is perhaps the very worst thing that can happen, and often has very widespread effects. It has been well pointed out by a modern writer that the existence of Mohammedanism to-day is really to be traced to Abraham's false step; Mohammedanism which is in some respects the deadliest opponent of Christianity. Isaac and Ishmael still struggle in fierce opposition.

6. *The necessity of prolonged waiting on God.*—God's will must be realised in God's way, and God's way often involves waiting God's time. The union of faith and patience (Heb. vi. 12) is one of the prime necessities of true spiritual life.

7. *The supreme secret of all true living.*—Abraham could hardly have been living in close touch with God, or his spiritual perception would have been keen enough to detect the danger lurking in Sarah's temptation. The only protection against error in thought and action is found in abiding with

A False Step

God, living in fellowship with Him, listening to His voice in His word, and keeping the pathway to His presence clear by prayer and alertness of attitude before Him. 'They that know their God shall be strong and do' (Dan. xi. 32, Heb.). **Gen. xvi.**

XXII

THE COVENANT RENEWED

Gen. xvii.

And when Abram was ninety years old and nine, the Lord appeared to Abram, and said unto him, I *am* the Almighty God; walk before Me, and be thou perfect.

And I will make My covenant between Me and thee, and will multiply thee exceedingly.

And Abram fell on his face: and God talked with him, saying,

As for Me, behold, My covenant *is* with thee, and thou shalt be a father of many nations.

Neither shall thy name any more be called Abram, but thy name shall be Abraham; for a father of many nations have I made thee.

And I will make thee exceeding fruitful, and I will make nations of thee, and kings shall come out of thee.

And I will establish My covenant between Me and thee, and thy seed after thee, in their generations, for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee.

And I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee, the land wherein thou art a stranger, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God.

And God said unto Abraham, Thou shalt keep My covenant therefore, thou, and thy seed after thee in their generations.

This *is* My covenant, which ye shall keep, between Me and you, and thy seed after thee; Every man-child among you shall be circumcised.

And ye shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskin; and it shall be a token of the covenant betwixt Me and you.

And he that is eight days old shall be circumcised among you, every man-child in your generations, he that is born in the house, or bought with money of any stranger, which *is* not of thy seed.

He that is born in thy house, and he that is bought with thy money, must needs be circumcised: and My covenant shall be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant.

The Covenant Renewed

And the uncircumcised man-child, whose flesh of his foreskin is not circumcised, that soul shall be cut off from his people; he hath broken My covenant.

And God said unto Abraham, As for Sarai thy wife, thou shalt not call her name Sarai, but Sarah *shall* her name *be*.

And I will bless her, and give thee a son also of her: yea, I will bless her, and she shall be *a mother* of nations; kings of people shall be of her.

Then Abraham fell upon his face, and laughed, and said in his heart, Shall *a child* be born unto him that is an hundred years old? and shall Sarah, that is ninety years old, bear?

And Abraham said unto God, O that Ishmael might live before Thee!

And God said, Sarah thy wife shall bear thee a son indeed; and thou shalt call his name Isaac: and I will establish My covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, *and* with his seed after him.

And as for Ishmael, I have heard thee: Behold, I have blessed him, and will make him fruitful, and will multiply him exceedingly; twelve princes shall he beget, and I will make him a great nation.

But My covenant will I establish with Isaac, which Sarah shall bear unto thee at this set time in the next year.

And He left off talking with him, and God went up from Abraham.

And Abraham took Ishmael his son, and all that were born in his house, and all that were bought with his money, every male among the men of Abraham's house, and circumcised the flesh of their foreskin in the selfsame day, as God had said unto him.

And Abraham *was* ninety years old and nine when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin.

And Ishmael his son *was* thirteen years old when he was circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin.

In the selfsame day was Abraham circumcised, and Ishmael his son.

And all the men of his house, born in the house, and bought with money of the stranger, were circumcised with him.

GOD has always some fresh surprise of knowledge, grace, and blessing with which to delight His children. We see this again and again in the life of Abraham, and not least of all in the story recorded in the present chapter. This episode was a great step forward in Abraham's spiritual

Gen. xvii.

Gen. xvii. relationship to God, as well as in his personal experience.

I. The Fresh Revelation (vers. 1-8).

I. *The Fresh Revelation* (vers. 1-8).—Abraham was at this period ninety-nine years old. Thirteen years had elapsed since the trouble about Hagar (chap. xvi. 16). Nothing is recorded of these years, and we may assume that there was no special or new revelation of God's will during the time. It was an opportunity of quiet waiting for, and waiting on God. Now once again the Lord appears to His servant.

This fresh appearance of God brought with it a new message (ver. 1). 'I am the Almighty God.' This was a new title of God (Hebrew: *El Shaddai*). The root idea seems to be that of power and ability, and is best rendered by the phrase 'the Mighty God,' the addition of 'All' being no necessary part of the word. This special emphasis upon God's power was very appropriate to the new message about to be given.

New knowledge always carries new responsibilities and we are not surprised to note the definite claim (ver. 1). 'Walk before Me, and be thou perfect' (upright). God called upon His servant to live and move in the Divine presence, and to be sincere, genuine, and true-hearted. Is this a hint that Abraham was settling down, satisfied with Ishmael, and no longer anxious about the special seed promised by God? Something of this seems to have been the case, or we should have hardly had this very definite call.

The personal result was soon seen (ver. 3).

'Abraham fell on his face.' This attitude of reverence and of readiness shows that Abraham realised at once the solemnity of the occasion. Gen. xvii.

And now for the first time we seem to become fully conscious of Abraham's high privilege (ver. 3). 'God talked with him.' Few of those whose lives are recorded in the Old Testament were on the same spiritual footing as Abraham. God once again shows His trust in His servant, and that He will not hide from him what He is about to do. How beautiful is the picture of this holy familiarity between the Mighty God and His servant!

Nor are we surprised to find that God gives to His servant a specially strong assurance (ver. 4). 'As for Me, behold, My covenant is with thee.' These words are evidently intended, by their emphatic reference to God Himself ('as for Me'), as a reminder to Abraham that, whatever he had forgotten, God had not been unmindful of His solemn promises. It is noteworthy that God reminds Abraham of an already existing covenant ('My covenant is with thee'), and then proceeds to tell him some of the forthcoming results of this existing fact. Not even the silence of thirteen years, still less the birth of Ishmael, can alter God's purposes or change His mind concerning Abraham.

The detailed promises of this new revelation deserve the most careful study (vers. 4-8). They deal with three great facts: (*a*) Abraham himself, (*b*) the land, (*c*) his seed. At this point a com-

Gen. xvii. parison should be made of the growth in the details of the revelation of God's purpose: chapter xii., 'a great nation'; chapter xiii., 'as the dust of the earth'; chapter xv., 'as the stars of heaven'; chapter xvii., 'many nations.'

II. The Necessary Requirements (vers. 9-14).

II. *The Necessary Requirements* (vers. 9-14).—Abraham is now told his part in the matter, and it is very striking and suggestive to notice that all that he has to do is to obey God's word in the one respect mentioned in these verses. This is another illustration of the fact that God's covenant of grace is divinely one-sided. God is the Giver; man the receiver, not the equal. The conditions to be fulfilled (vers. 10-14) are now stated. The ordinance of circumcision, already known widely in the East, is given a special meaning and deep sacredness. The truths connected with it seem to include at least four ideas: (*a*) designation, as belonging to God; (*b*) separation unto Him; (*c*) purity in Him; (*d*) possession by Him. It is also noteworthy that we are here brought face to face for the first time in Holy Scripture with young life in relation to God. God entered into covenant with little children, and as the covenant with Abraham was one of grace we see the true place of little children in the kingdom of God. Circumcision was not merely a mark of the Mosaic dispensation and Jewish covenant of works; it was, as here, pre-Mosaic, associated with the covenant of grace, and therefore independent of, and wider than, the Jewish national life (John vii. 22). God is here seen in the attitude of Father

to little children, and He has never altered that attitude. Gen. xvii.

III. *The Further Revelation* (vers. 15, 16). — Not only Abraham's, but also his wife's name is now changed. This is another indication of God's purpose and a special assurance of blessing. And now for the first time Sarah is announced as the mother of the promised seed. Up to this moment everything had been couched in general terms as to 'seed,' but without special reference to Sarah. God's promises become more definite and detailed as time goes on and need arises. III. The Further Revelation (vers. 15, 16).

IV. *The Immediate Response* (vers. 17, 18).— Abraham receives the new revelation of God with reverence, and yet with a certain trustful astonishment. The laugh is evidently not the laugh of unbelief, but of a faith which, while taking God at His word, considers the news almost too good to be true. God's revelations to His people often seem to be too good to be true, and yet they *are* true! IV. The Immediate Response (vers. 17, 18).

But there is one shadow over the scene. He is thinking of his growing son. How natural was this appeal on behalf of Ishmael! The boy had won his way to his father's heart, and it would have been surprising from the natural and human standpoint if Abraham had not desired Ishmael to be his heir. And yet, notwithstanding the naturalness of the appeal, there lies at the root of it a desire to have 'some substitute for God's promises.' It is as though anything else would really do as well. God knows better than His servant, and we have His answer at once.

Gen. xvii.

V. The Full Revelation (vers. 19-22).

V. *The Full Revelation* (vers. 19-22). — Not even the intense appeal can stand before God's purposes. God will maintain His own way, and so He assures Abraham that Sarah is indeed to be the mother of the seed, that the son's name shall be Isaac ('Laughter'), and that the covenant which is to be everlasting is to be realised through Isaac, and not through Ishmael.

Nevertheless Ishmael shall not be forgotten. He is Abraham's seed, and as the son of God's servant he will be blessed and made a great nation. Thus God overrules His children's mistakes, and in loving condescension and tender mercy brings blessing out of trouble.

VI. The Loyal Reception (vers. 23-27).

VI. *The Loyal Reception* (vers. 23-27).—Now the time of communion has come to an end, and God leaves His servant to ponder what has been said and to respond to the revelation.

How prompt was his obedience (ver. 23). 'In the selfsame day, as God had said.' How striking in their simplicity are these words, indicating the immediateness of Abraham's trustful obedience! This is ever the pathway of blessing. 'Whatsoever He saith unto you, do it,' and do it at once!

How complete was his acceptance (ver. 27). Not only as to himself and Ishmael, but also as to all his house, Abraham fulfilled the Divine requirement and bestowed the sign of the covenant. They were all included in the Divine blessings, for God knew that Abraham would influence his whole household aright.

In this fresh revelation Abraham learned much about God, and the same lessons are needed by us to-day. The more we know of God, the stronger and richer will be our lives. **Gen. xvii. Suggestions for Meditation.**

1. *A new view of God's Character.*—God revealed Himself to Abraham as a God of might and power (ver. 1), and, as such, able to fulfil all his hopes. God does not wish His children to be content with anything else than His fullest blessings, and for the accomplishment of this 'He is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think.' The various passages in the New Testament where we read that 'God is able' call for earnest meditation.

2. *A wider view of God's Purposes.*—Abraham little realised the far-reaching extent and universal scope of God's purpose concerning him. He was now taught this as he had never been taught before, in great wealth of detail and definiteness of meaning. It is always well to have our view of God's mind for the world extended and deepened, and so 'think His thoughts after Him.'

3. *A clearer view of God's Will.*—God's will for us, as it was for Abraham, is loyal obedience. As the little child said of the angels in heaven who do God's will there, 'they obey without asking any questions.' This, and this alone, is the secret of power in daily living.

4. *A fuller view of God's Grace.*—The whole chapter is full of grace. It was grace that prompted, planned, and provided these blessings

Gen. xvii. for Abraham. It was grace that condescended to Abraham's weaknesses, limitations, and faults. It was grace that persisted with Abraham in spite of every check and drawback, and it was grace that perfected everything concerning him. God is still 'the God of all grace,' and it is the believer's joy to experience the 'unsearchable riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.'

XXIII

FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD

Gen. xviii. 1-21

And the Lord appeared unto him in the plains of Mamre: and he sat in the tent door in the heat of the day:

And he lift up his eyes and looked, and, lo, three men stood by him: and when he saw *them*, he ran to meet them from the tent door, and bowed himself toward the ground,

And said, My Lord if now I have found favour in thy sight, pass not away, I pray thee, from thy servant:

Let a little water, I pray you, be fetched, and wash your feet, and rest yourselves under the tree:

And I will fetch a morsel of bread, and comfort ye your hearts; after that ye shall pass on: for therefore are ye come to your servant. And they said, So do, as thou hast said.

And Abraham hastened into the tent unto Sarah, and said, Make ready quickly three measures of fine meal, knead *it*, and make cakes upon the hearth.

And Abraham ran unto the herd, and fetcht a calf tender and good, and gave *it* unto a young man; and he hasted to dress it.

And he took butter, and milk, and the calf which he had dressed, and set *it* before them; and he stood by them under the tree, and they did eat.

And they said unto him, Where *is* Sarah thy wife? And he said, Behold, in the tent.

And he said, I will certainly return unto thee according to the time of life; and, lo, Sarah thy wife shall have a son. And Sarah heard *it* in the tent door, which *was* behind him.

Now Abraham and Sarah *were* old *and* well stricken in age: *and* it ceased to be with Sarah after the manner of women.

Therefore Sarah laughed within herself, saying, After I am waxed old shall I have pleasure, my lord being old also?

And the Lord said unto Abraham, Wherefore did Sarah laugh, saying, Shall I of a surety bear a child, which am old?

Is any thing too hard for the Lord? At the time appointed I

will return unto thee, according to the time of life, and Sarah shall have a son.

Then Sarah denied, saying, I laughed not; for she was afraid. And he said, Nay: but thou didst laugh.

And the men rose up from thence, and looked toward Sodom: and Abraham went with them to bring them on the way.

And the Lord said, Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do;

Seeing that Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him?

For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment; that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him.

And the Lord said, Because the cry of Sodom and Gomorrah is great, and because their sin is very grievous;

I will go down now, and see whether they have done altogether according to the cry of it, which is come unto me: and if not, I will know.

Gen. xviii. 1-21.

OUR life in relation to God can be summed up in four words—sonship, worship, stewardship, fellowship. The believer is at once a son, a subject, a servant, and a friend of God. The last-named relationship marks the later period of Abraham's life, and seems to be (as always) associated with growth and maturity of spiritual experience. In this chapter there are several aspects of the believer's fellowship with God, and it is probable that from this period commence those experiences which led to Abraham being called the 'friend of God' (2 Chron. xx. 7; Isa. xli. 8; Jas. ii. 23). He is the only one to whom this designation is given in the Old Testament.

I. The Divine Appearance (vers. 1-8).

I. *The Divine Appearance* (vers. 1-8).—The character of the appearance is noteworthy. It was not in the form of a vision (chap. xv.), nor was it merely

a word or message (chap. xvii.). It was a Divine appearance as a Guest, thus marking Abraham's position of friendship and fellowship with God. Gen. xviii. 1-21.

It is evident that the 'three men' represent a personal manifestation of God in visible form, accompanied by two created angels (ver. 22 and xix. 1). The fact that the Church of England uses this chapter as a Lesson for Trinity Sunday indicates that this chapter has been regarded as in some sense a foreshadowing of the doctrine of the Trinity. We must, of course, be careful not to read too much of such a New Testament idea into it, though we are perfectly safe, and entirely warranted, in seeing in this unique manifestation an indication of certain essential distinctions in the Godhead which subsequently were fully revealed as the Trinity of the New Testament.

The response made by Abraham (vers. 2-8) is a characteristic picture of Eastern politeness and hospitality. The elements of courtesy (ver. 2), activity (vers. 6-7), hospitality (vers. 7-8), and respect (ver. 8) are very interesting and noteworthy, and strictly true to Eastern life to-day. The prominence given to hospitality in the New Testament is also to be pondered (Rom. xii. 13; 1 Tim. iii. 2; 3 John 5-7). Abraham indeed 'entertained angels unawares' (Heb. xiii. 2).

II. *The Divine Assurance* (vers. 9-15).—The question 'Where is Sarah thy wife?' showed that the strangers knew her name, and the words which immediately followed quickly told him Who the speaker was. The promise of a son was then repeated, II. The Divine Assurance (vers. 9-15).

Gen. xviii. 1-21.

with the assurance of the near approach of its fulfilment.

Sarah received this message with the utter astonishment of unbelief. She could not credit the possibility of it. This is only one out of several indications in the course of the story that Sarah's spiritual kinship with Abraham was not very close, and that she had never really risen with him to his clear faith in God.

Sarah was now taught a solemn and severe lesson. She was first of all reminded of God's power. 'Is anything too hard for the Lord?' And when she denied her laughter, she was reminded of God's knowledge (ver. 15). Sarah now became aware of the real character of her visitors, and we see the result in her fear even while she denied the laughter.

III. The Divine Announcement (vers. 16-21).

III. *The Divine Announcement* (vers. 16-21). —The visitors then left the hospitable tent of Abraham, and with characteristic courtesy Abraham accompanied them on their journey. The time had come for a further revelation to Abraham.

How beautiful is the suggestion made by the Divine soliloquy! 'Shall I hide from Abraham that thing which I do?' God's friends are permitted to know His secrets because they are His friends. Abraham is regarded by God as having a right to know what was about to be done (Ps. xxv. 4; Amos iii. 7).

God reveals His purpose to Abraham for very weighty reasons. He is to be the means of blessing to all nations (ver. 18), and it is therefore necessary

for him to know the reason of this destruction of two of the cities of the earth—Sodom and Gomorrah. Further, Abraham's influence over posterity (ver. 19, R.V.) required that he should know of this judgment in order that it might be used as a solemn lesson in the days to come (Ps. lxxviii. 1-8). Again, it was his influence with those under his charge, and their obedience, that would in some way bring about the fulfilment of God's word to Abraham himself (ver. 19, last clause). **Gen. xviii. 1-21.**

God now tells His servant of the terrible sin of Sodom and Gomorrah, and of His Divine determination to examine into it and to deal with it accordingly. Thus the servant of God learns the Divine will and enters more fully into the Divine purposes.

Suggestions for Meditation.

In this section we have an illustration of fellowship with God and some of its essential features. Fellowship is the crowning purpose of God's revelation (1 John i. 3). There is nothing higher than this, for man's life finds its complete realisation in union and communion with God. Notice the following elements:—

1. *Sacred Intimacy.*—The picture of God as the guest of Abraham is a symbol of that spiritual relationship which is brought very clearly and beautifully before us in the New Testament. What an unspeakable privilege it is to have God as our Guest, and for us to be His guests (John xiv. 23; Rev. iii. 20.)

Gen. xviii. 1-21.

2. *Genuine Humility.*—Abraham's attitude on this occasion is noteworthy. He quickly realised Who had come, and although he had all the privileges of fellowship, he never forgot his own true place and position. So is it always with the true believer. He never forgets that, notwithstanding all the privileges of fellowship, God is God, and he himself is nothing. Reverence is never separated from the fullest, freest realisation of the Gospel of Grace. While we have 'access,' it is 'access into the *Holiest*' (Heb. x. 19). There is no incompatibility, but the most beautiful fitness in the freedom, freeness, and fulness of Divine grace, combined with the attitude of reverential awe in those who are partakers of grace. 'Holy and reverend is His Name' (Ps. cxi. 9).

3. *Special Revelation.*—Fellowship with God is always associated with the knowledge of His will. Servants do not know their master's purposes, but friends and intimates do. Our Lord taught this plainly to His disciples (John xv. 15). There is no position like that of fellowship with God for knowing fully our Master's will. (*Cf.* John xiii. 25, R.V.).

4. *Unique Association.*—The man who is in fellowship with God does not merely know the Divine will, but becomes associated with God in the carrying out of that will. God deliberately and definitely associated Abraham with the realisation of His purposes (vers. 17-19), and this has ever been the case. The friends of God become His fellow-workers, and are used to carry out

the wide-reaching purposes of His will to mankind. In view of all these glorious privileges and solemn responsibilities of fellowship with God, 'what manner of persons ought we to be in all holy conversation and godliness?' Gen. xviii. 1-21.

XXIV

THE MINISTRY OF INTERCESSION

Gen. xviii. 22-33—xix. 27-29

And the men turned their faces from thence, and went toward Sodom: but Abraham stood yet before the Lord.

And Abraham drew near, and said, Wilt thou also destroy the righteous with the wicked?

Peradventure there be fifty righteous within the city: wilt thou also destroy and not spare the place for the fifty righteous that *are* therein?

That be far from Thee to do after this manner, to slay the righteous with the wicked: and that the righteous should be as the wicked, that be far from Thee: Shall not the judge of all the earth do right?

And the Lord said, If I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, then I will spare all the place for their sakes.

And Abraham answered and said, Behold, now, I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord which *am but* dust and ashes:

Peradventure there shall lack five of the fifty righteous: wilt thou destroy all the city for *lack of* five? And He said, If I find there forty and five, I will not destroy *it*.

And he spake unto Him yet again, and said, Peradventure there shall be forty found there. And He said, I will not do *it* for forty's sake.

And he said *unto Him*, O let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak: Peradventure there shall thirty be found there. And He said, I will not do *it* if I find thirty there.

And he said, Behold now, I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord: Peradventure there shall be twenty found there. And He said, I will not destroy *it* for twenty's sake.

And he said, O let not the Lord be angry, and I will speak yet but this once: Peradventure ten shall be found there. And He said, I will not destroy *it* for ten's sake.

And the Lord went His way, as soon as He had left communing with Abraham: and Abraham returned unto his place.

The Ministry of Intercession

And Abraham gat up early in the morning to the place where he stood before the Lord:

And he looked toward Sodom and Gomorrah, and toward all the land of the plain, and beheld, and, lo, the smoke of the country went up as the smoke of a furnace.

And it came to pass, when God destroyed the cities of the plain, that God remembered Abraham, and sent Lot out of the midst of the overthrow, when He overthrew the cities in the which Lot dwelt.

Gen. xviii. 22-33—xix. 27-29.

ONE of the essential and most blessed features of the believer's fellowship with God is the privilege and responsibility, the joy and duty of intercession. The Divine announcement concerning Sodom led Abraham to intercede for the doomed city. God's revelation thus finds its response in His servant's intercession. Some of the elements of intercession are clearly shown in the above passages.

I. The Privileged Position (vers. 22-23).

I. *The Privileged Position* (vers. 22-23).—Intercession with God presupposes a spiritual relationship and position from which all else follows.

He was in God's presence. 'Abraham stood yet before the Lord.' The two angels had gone on to Sodom to fulfil the Divine will, leaving the Angel of the Covenant with Abraham.

He also realised God's nearness. 'Abraham drew near.' How like this language is to the teaching of the Epistle to the Hebrews (Heb. x. 22). Abraham was on a true footing of fellowship as he poured out his heart to God.

He also knew God's will. He had already been told what God was about to do, and this led him to prayer.

We have here a striking illustration of the true

Gen. xviii. 22-33—xix. 27-29.

spirituality and power of Abraham's life. Several elements of real prayer are clearly seen.

II. The Earnest Spirit (vers. 23, 24).

II. *The Earnest Spirit* (vers. 23, 24).—His compassion is manifest. Abraham's prayer is evidently for the whole city and not merely for his nephew Lot. It is striking that he does not mention Lot from beginning to end, but only prays for the city.

His definiteness is noteworthy. He asked for what he wanted, and this is always the true attitude in prayer. God will tell us whether what we want is also what He thinks we need, but meanwhile our prayers should be definite.

His boldness is striking. There is no hesitation in his utterance, no fear in his attitude. Everything is frank, fearless, courageous, for the simple reason that he knows Whom he believes. Our Lord frequently inculcated boldness in prayer (Luke xi. 5-10; xviii. 1-8).

III. The Urgent Plea (vers. 23-25).

III. *The Urgent Plea* (vers. 23-25).—But Abraham was perplexed by the fact that the destruction of Sodom would involve the destruction of righteous men with wicked ones. With this difficulty in his mind he did the very best thing; he told God about it. Problems thus brought to God will either be resolved, or else sufficient grace will be given to wait for the perfect solution. Abraham had somehow got hold of the great principle that good people are as salt preventing surrounding corruption. How often one Christian in a family keeps back Divine judgment on sin! How often wandering boys are withheld from ruin through their mother's prayers!

Yet he cannot help entertaining a strong conviction. He felt that it was impossible that the righteous could be destroyed with the wicked. In the absence of any revelation of a future judgment redressing present inequalities, we are not surprised at Abraham's strong assertion of his sense of the injustice of indiscriminate destruction. He was evidently concerned for God also, and was particularly anxious that the heathen around should not get a wrong impression of the God of Abraham. Gen. xviii. 22-33—xix. 27-29.

And all the while he rests in a sure confidence in God. 'Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?' He makes his appeal to God's righteousness rather than to His mercy, and in so doing he touches the very foundation of things. With a perfect trust in the absolute justice of God he pours out his heart and tells God his difficulties. This is the true spirit of the believer who is face to face with the great mysteries of life. He takes them all to God in prayer, and in the presence of Divine righteousness he finds that rest of heart which enables him to wait patiently for God (Psalms xxxvii. 6, 7; lxxiii. 16, 17).

IV. *The Divine Encouragement* (ver. 26).—Let us observe, moreover, how point by point the prayer was met by a Divine response: 'And the Lord said.' Thus God spoke to His servant in answer to prayer. So it ever is with the believer. God's Word is the complement of and response to our petitions. IV. The Divine Encouragement (ver. 26).

'If I find . . . I will spare.' God met his servant's request by a definite promise that if He found fifty righteous He would spare the place.

Gen. xviii. 22-33—xix. 27-29.

'For their sakes.' Thus God responded to His servant's conviction that there was indeed a power and influence in good people. The whole city is to be spared, notwithstanding its sin, simply and solely on account of fifty people therein. Nothing can be clearer than this testimony to the salutary power and influence of godliness (Matt. v. 13).

V. The Deep Humility (ver. 27).

V. *The Deep Humility* (ver. 27).—Abraham had a profound consciousness of God. 'I have taken upon me to speak unto the Lord.' Again we notice how his friendship with God is never allowed to make him forget his true position of dependence.

He also had an equally real and deep knowledge of himself. 'Which am but dust and ashes.' This is always the consciousness of the true child of God as he abides in the Divine presence. God's holiness and our sinfulness, God's greatness and our nothingness, are the overwhelming experiences.

VI. The Earnest Persistence (vers. 29-32).

VI. *The Earnest Persistence* (vers. 29-32).—Six times Abraham intercedes for the wicked cities. His heart is drawn out in pity and compassion, and he pleads again and again. Persistence in prayer is one of the prominent features of New Testament teaching. 'Continuing instant' (Rom. xii. 12). Steadfastness in intercession is one of the sure marks of reality and earnestness.

Six times God responded to His servant's prayer. After each petition came the definite answer. So is it always; as long as we ask, God will answer. Notice the threefold promise with its element of increasing persistency in Matt. vii. 7.

VII. *The Natural Limitation* (ver. 33).—Why, then, did Abraham stop praying when he reached the number ten? Probably because of his ignorance of the extent and effect of Sodom's sin, and, from another point of view, probably because of his ignorance of the extent of the Divine mercy and longsuffering. Gen. xviii. 22-33—xix. 27-29. VII. The Natural Limitation (ver. 33).

As it has often been said, Abraham ceased asking before God ceased giving. The reason why Abraham did not go lower than ten was possibly due to the fact that now he did not think there were anything like that number in the city.

We naturally compare and contrast Abraham's words, 'I will speak yet but this once,' with the intercession of our Lord Jesus Christ, Whose pleading on our behalf knows no limitation whatever. 'He is able to save to the *uttermost* . . . seeing that He *ever liveth* to make intercession' (Heb. vii. 25).

VIII. *The Gracious Answer* (xix. 27-29).—'Abraham rose up early in the morning and looked towards Sodom.' Somehow or other he must have expected that God would at least deliver the one righteous man that was in Sodom, and not destroy him with the rest. VIII. The Gracious Answer (chap. xix. 27-29).

Is it not very significant that Lot's preservation is here directly connected with Abraham's intercession? Thus Abraham saved his nephew for the second time. The first time by the sword (chap. xiv.), the second time by supplication (chap. xviii.).

1. *The solemn responsibilities of Intercession.*—How striking are the words of Samuel teaching Suggestions for Meditation.

Gen. xviii. 22-33—xix. 27-29.

us that we are actually sinning against God if we do not pray for others! (1 Sam. xii. 23.) Do we clearly realise this? Does it not make us ashamed and even afraid when we remember how little we pray for others as compared with our prayers for ourselves? And yet there is scarcely any part of prayer more prominent in the New Testament than prayer for others (Jas. v. 16; 2 Thess. iii. 1; Eph. vi. 17, 18; 1 Tim. ii. 1). The reason why intercessory prayer is thus so plainly taught is that it is the best opportunity we possess of showing spiritual interest in others. Our Christian life will never be really healthy and strong until we make intercession a very prominent and even predominant feature of our private devotions. The Lord's Prayer gives us the model in this as in other respects.

2. *The marvellous possibilities of Intercession.* 'The Lord turned the captivity of Job, when he prayed for his friends' (Job xlii. 10). This shows the reflex blessing of intercessory prayer, but far beyond this is the social value of intercession. God has included in His great purpose of redemptive love the power and blessing of prayer for others, and if only God's people would realise what their prayers could do for the world, they would take up this work of priestly intercession in a way that they have never realised before. Only the great day will reveal what has been done by intercessory prayer. The Apostle Paul depended greatly on it in his ministry, and was frequently asking his friends to remember him and his work in prayer.

3. *The essential conditions of Intercession.*—We can only intercede in proportion as we abide in close fellowship with God. 'If ye abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you' (John xv. 7). Asking in our Lord's Name (John xiv. 13; xvi. 23) is another way of stating the need of union and communion with God. 'In My Name' means, not simply using His Name as a plea, but praying in union with Him and with all that we know of His will. When these conditions are fulfilled the Lord's words become blessedly true. 'Ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you.' 'Ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full.' (*Cf.* 1 John iii. 22; v. 14, 15.)

Gen. xviii. 22-33—xix. 27-29.

XXV

THE STORY OF LOT

Gen. xix.

And there came two angels to Sodom at even; and Lot sat in the gate of Sodom: and Lot seeing *them*, rose up to meet them; and he bowed himself with his face toward the ground:

And he said, Behold now, my lords, turn in, I pray you, into your servant's house, and tarry all night, and wash your feet, and ye shall rise up early, and go on your ways. And they said, Nay; but we will abide in the street all night.

And he pressed upon them greatly; and they turned in unto him, and entered into his house: and he made them a feast, and did bake unleavened bread, and they did eat.

But, before they lay down, the men of the city, *even* the men of Sodom, compassed the house round, both old and young, all the people from every quarter.

And they called unto Lot, and said unto him, Where *are* the men which came in to thee this night? bring them out unto us, that we may know them.

And Lot went out at the door unto them, and shut the door after him,

And said, I pray you, brethren, do not so wickedly.

Behold now, I have two daughters which have not known man; let me, I pray you, bring them out unto you, and do ye to them as *is* good in your eyes: only unto these men do nothing: for therefore came they under the shadow of my roof.

And they said, Stand back. And they said *again*, This one *fellow* came in to sojourn, and he will needs be a judge: now we will deal worse with thee than with them. And they pressed sore upon the man, *even* Lot, and came near to break the door.

But the men put forth their hand, and pulled Lot into the house to them, and shut to the door.

And they smote the men that *were* at the door of the house with blindness, both small and great: so that they wearied themselves to find the door.

And the men said unto Lot, Hast thou here any besides?

son-in-law, and thy sons, and thy daughters, and whatsoever thou hast in the city, bring *them* out of this place:

For we will destroy this place, because the cry of them is waxen great before the face of the Lord; and the Lord hath sent us to destroy it.

And Lot went out, and spake unto his sons-in-law, which married his daughters, and said, Up, get you out of this place; for the Lord will destroy this city. But he seemed as one that mocked unto his sons-in-law.

And when the morning arose, then the angels hastened Lot, saying, Arise, take thy wife, and thy two daughters, which are here; lest thou be consumed in the iniquity of the city.

And while he lingered, the men laid hold upon his hand, and upon the hand of his wife, and upon the hand of his two daughters; the Lord being merciful unto him: and they brought him forth, and set him without the city.

And it came to pass, when they had brought them forth abroad, that he said, Escape for thy life; look not behind thee, neither stay thou in all the plain: escape to the mountain, lest thou be consumed.

And Lot said unto them, Oh! not so, my lord.

Behold now, thy servant hath found grace in thy sight, and thou hast magnified thy mercy, which thou hast shewed unto me in saving my life; and I cannot escape to the mountain, lest some evil take me, and I die.

Behold now, this city *is* near to flee unto, and it *is* a little one: Oh! let me escape thither (*is* it not a little one?) and my soul shall live.

And he said unto him, See, I have accepted thee concerning this thing also, that I will not overthrow this city, for the which thou hast spoken.

Haste thee escape thither; for I cannot do any thing till thou be come thither. Therefore the name of the city was called Zoar.

The sun was risen upon the earth when Lot entered into Zoar.

Then the Lord rained upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the Lord out of heaven.

And He overthrew those cities, and all the plain, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and that which grew upon the ground.

But his wife looked back from behind him, and she became a pillar of salt.

And Abraham gat up early in the morning to the place where he stood before the Lord.

And he looked toward Sodom and Gomorrah, and toward all the land of the plain, and beheld, and, lo, the smoke of the country went up as the smoke of a furnace.

And it came to pass, when God destroyed the cities of the plain, that God remembered Abraham, and sent Lot out of the

midst of the overthrow, when He overthrew the cities in which Lot dwelt.

And Lot went up out of Zoar, and dwelt in the mountain, and his two daughters with him; for he feared to dwell in Zoar: and he dwelt in a cave, he and his two daughters.

And the first-born said unto the younger, Our father *is* old, and *there is* not a man in the earth to come in unto us after the manner of all the earth:

Come, let us make our father drink wine, and we will lie with him, that we may preserve seed of our father.

And they made their father drink wine that night: and the first-born went in, and lay with her father; and he perceived not when she lay down, nor when she arose.

And it came to pass on the morrow, that the first-born said unto the younger, Behold, I lay yesternight with my father: let us make him drink wine this night also; and go thou in, *and* lie with him, that we may preserve seed of our father.

And they made their father drink wine that night also: and the younger arose, and lay with him; and he perceived not when she lay down, nor when she arose.

Thus were both the daughters of Lot with child by their father.

And the first-born bare a son, and called his name Moab: the same *is* the father of the Moabites unto this day.

And the younger, she also bare a son, and called his name Ben-ammi: the same *is* the father of the children of Ammon unto this day.

Gen. xix. THERE are lives recorded in the Bible which have well been called beacons. There are men like Balaam, Saul, and Solomon, who started well, with every possible advantage, and then closed their careers in failure and disaster. Such a life was that of Lot the nephew of Abraham. He came out of Mesopotamia with his uncle, and continued with him in Canaan until their possessions necessitated a separation (chapters xii., xiii.). He thereupon pitched his tent towards Sodom, but soon entered and abode in the city. As a consequence he was involved in its captivity by the kings of the East (chapter xiv.). Even his rescue

by Abraham did not suffice to warn him from the place, for he returned and lived there as before. Gen. xix.

There is scarcely a life recorded in Scripture which is fuller of serious and solemn instruction for every believer.

I. *The Angelic Visit* (vers. 1-3). — While the Divine personage remained in company with Abraham, the two attendant angels journeyed on to Sodom, where Lot was sitting in the gate, the place of concourse, the place of importance. It is not improbable that he sat there in an official capacity as judge. With the true spirit of Eastern courtesy he rose to meet them, and greeted them with profound obeisance, also offering to them hospitality. At first they declined his invitation, alleging a somewhat remarkable reason, 'We will abide in the street all night.' They were there for the purpose of exploration with a view to judgment, and perhaps this was why they suggested remaining all night in the open street. But Lot urged them, and at last they yielded, and accepted his hospitality. I. The Angelic Visit (vers. 1-3).

II. *The Awful Depravity* (vers. 4-11). — Into the fearful story recorded in these verses it is impossible to enter for more than the barest comment. Every one knows that the sin hinted at here is perpetuated for ever by a word in our language to which this chapter has given rise. Perhaps two other cities have equalled Sodom in this respect, the cities of Pompeii and Herculaneum, both of which have suffered in a similar way from devastation, and one of them to this very day II. The Awful Depravity (vers. 4-11).

Gen. xix. reveals the unspeakable depravity of its inhabitants. One other point dare not be overlooked in this hideous recital of sin, and that is, the selfish readiness of Lot to sacrifice his daughters in order to save his own life and peace.

III. The Solemn Warning (vers. 12-14).

III. *The Solemn Warning* (vers. 12-14).—The angels now enquire of Lot as to his kinsfolk, and command him to bring them out of the wicked city. They also announce in the plainest terms the purpose of their errand. 'The Lord hath sent us to destroy it.' Lot does not hesitate to believe their testimony, and at once goes forth to urge upon his sons-in-law the absolute necessity of getting quickly out of the city. 'But he seemed as one that mocked.' His testimony had no power. He had lived too long as one of themselves, without any very real difference, to allow of his message being of any avail. When the testimony of the life does not agree with the testimony of the lips the latter always goes unheeded. It is the life that is the true light.

IV. The Urgent Deliverance (vers. 15-22).

IV. *The Urgent Deliverance* (vers. 15-22).—At daybreak the angels had to urge Lot to take his wife and two daughters out of the city, 'lest they be consumed.' Even then Lot lingered, until at last the men laid hold upon him, his wife, and his daughters, and compelled them to go outside the city, 'the Lord being merciful.' On reaching the confines of the city another urgent appeal was made. 'Escape for thy life; look not behind thee, neither stay thou in all the plain; escape to the mountain.'

Even now, with almost incredible weakness, Lot pleads that the mountain is too far away, and begs to be permitted to go to the neighbouring city of Zoar. The Divine messengers concede this point, urging him once more to escape, since God was unable to do anything till His servant was in safety. What a marvellous picture of the Divine condescension and patience with one of the frailest of His creatures. Gen. xix.

V. *The Divine Judgment* (vers. 23-26).—Lot, together with his wife and his daughters, had only reached Zoar when the Lord poured out His judgment on the wicked cities and overthrew them and all their people. Lot's wife seems to have been equally attracted to Sodom, for we are told that she looked back, and was soon engulfed in the lava by which the cities were destroyed. With husband and wife both weak, hesitating, and yielding, there can be no surprise at what we know of their family life. V. The Divine Judgment (vers. 23-26).

VI. *The Powerful Intercession* (vers. 27-29).—Abraham rose early that morning on his way to a place from which he could see the plain of the Jordan valley. As he looked towards the cities he saw a smoke like that of a furnace, and yet with exquisite suggestiveness we have inserted at this point the indication that Abraham's prayer was answered so far as concerned his nephew. 'God remembered Abraham, and sent Lot out.' Abraham had ceased praying at the mention of ten righteous, but God was better than his prayers, and heard him for four only. VI. The Powerful Intercession (vers. 27-29).

Gen. xix.
VII. The Unutterable Shame (vers. 30-38).

VII. *The Unutterable Shame* (vers. 30-38).—Again it is impossible to comment on this unspeakably sorrowful scene. Drunkenness and impurity are once more seen in association. It perhaps says one thing for Lot that it was only by means of the sin of drunkenness that his daughters could accomplish their ends. Yet this is but an infinitesimal point by comparison, for we cannot forget that Moab and Ammon (though they were kinsmen to Abraham) were in after years among the most implacable foes of Abraham's descendants. As for Lot he had sounded the lowest depths of shame, and passes away into the darkness and oblivion that were his due.

Suggestions for Meditation.

1. *Lessons from Sodom.*—(*a*) We observe the awful extent of human depravity. This is one of the most terrible chapters in the Bible, and is a reminder of the hideous possibilities of sin, and the extent to which evil can take hold of human nature. When the restraints of the Divine law are removed or set at naught there are scarcely any limits to human degeneracy and depravity (Rom. i. 21-31; 2 Pet. ii. 8; Jude 7, 8).

(*b*) We mark the certainty of Divine judgment. The iniquity of Sodom was indeed full. 'The cry of them is waxen great before the face of the Lord,' and when human sin reaches its awful fruit the judgment is as certain as it is unerring. There is no fact in God's universe more certain and assured than this, that He is not, and cannot, and will not be indifferent to human sin.

(*c*) We note the marvel of Divine mercy. From the narrative it might seem that Lot was not worth saving. His weakness amounted to wickedness, and yet again and again God bore with him, waited for him, pleaded with him, urged him, and at length did not bring down the Divine judgment until he was safe out of Sodom. Is there anything in this world so wonderful as the mercy that waits for us, follows us, hedges our path, and short of compulsion does everything to keep us from ruin? **Gen. xix.**

2. *Lessons from Lot.*—(*a*) His dangers may easily be ours also. His first danger was from things lawful. It was not wrong to desire a good place for his flocks and herds. The sin was in putting earthly ease and prosperity first. 'More men are killed by meat than poison.' More souls are lost by abuse of things lawful than by the use of things unlawful. It is not wrong to have possessions, it is only wrong to let possessions have us. A ship in the water is perfectly right, but the water in the ship would be perfectly wrong. The Christian in the world is right and necessary, but the world in the Christian is wrong and disastrous. Another danger of Lot's was that of compromise. At first he pitched his tent *towards* Sodom, but soon entered the city and stayed there. He doubtless thought he could testify to the wicked people, but his words were nothing without deeds. They were quick enough to see that he was as sharp about money-making as the rest of them. A Christian must be outside Sodom in order to testify against it. To go into the world

Gen. xix. to influence it is futile and fatal. The world does not need influencing but saving, and for this the Christian must live a life of separation, 'in the world, but not of the world.' This suggests yet a third danger that Lot incurred, that of worldliness. He did testify and showed genuine hospitality, but his character was weakened, and his life was essentially selfish from the moment that he chose the best part of the land to the moment when he was prepared to sacrifice his daughters for his own safety. Some men are utterly unable to bear worldly success. It affects their character and their home life. Not least of all this worldliness endangered his happiness. He 'got on' in the world, he sat in the gate as a leading citizen, but he was miserable. He 'vexed his soul' day by day in seeing and hearing their wickedness (2 Pet. ii. 8). It is always so with those who do not put God first. Those who put Him second are the most miserable of men.

(*b*) His weakness may be ours also. He lacked the spirit of true independence. He was all right as long as he was with the stronger nature of Abraham, but he never seems to have been right afterwards. When the prop was removed he fell. It is often the case with Christian people to-day. Their religion is one of association. As long as they are surrounded with Christian friends, and connected with a Christian Church, their life seems to be perfectly right; but let these supports be removed, and they themselves placed alone in difficult surroundings, and their weakness is at once

seen. Lot also lacked decision. At every point of the story from his separation from Abraham indecision is stamped on his career. Mark in this chapter the urgency of the angels, and the references to his lingering, and to their hastening him. Even Zoar had to be left and the mountain reached after all. Every true life needs decision and firmness of character. Otherwise when emergencies come circumstances are too strong and we fall. 'The flighty purpose never is o'ertook, unless the deed go with it.' Gen. xix.

(*c*) Lot's needs may be ours also. The one supreme and all-embracing requirement was whole-hearted trust in and consecration to God. But for the phrase 'righteous Lot' (2 Pet. ii. 7) we should have scarcely believed him to be in any sense a believer. From the Old Testament narrative he seems to be apparently godly, but really worldly, and the explanation is that there was nothing whole-hearted about his relation to God. His religion, though real as far as it went, was so entirely superficial that it did not cover more than a small part of his life. And so he was a backslider, an awful failure, his soul saved, but his life lost. 'Saved, so as by fire.' What a call it is to keep close to God and to His people, to witness for God to the world around, never to indulge in any half-way house between godliness and worldliness, but to let our light shine, and live by faith in the Son of God Who loved us and gave Himself for us.

XXVI

AN OLD SIN REPEATED

Gen. xx.

And Abraham journeyed from thence toward the south country, and dwelled between Kadesh and Shur, and sojourned in Gerar.

And Abraham said of Sarah his wife, She *is* my sister: and Abimelech king of Gerar sent and took Sarah.

But God came to Abimelech in a dream by night, and said to him, Behold, thou *art but* a dead man, for the woman which thou hast taken; for she *is* a man's wife.

But Abimelech had not come near her: and he said, Lord, wilt thou slay also a righteous nation?

Said he not unto me, She *is* my sister? and she, even she herself said, He *is* my brother. In the integrity of my heart, and innocency of my hands, have I done this.

And God said unto him in a dream, Yea, I know that thou didst this in the integrity of thy heart; for I also withheld thee from sinning against me: therefore suffered I thee not to touch her.

Now therefore restore the man *his* wife; for he *is* a prophet, and he shall pray for thee, and thou shalt live: and if thou restore *her* not, know thou that thou shalt surely die, thou, and all that *are* thine.

Therefore Abimelech rose early in the morning, and called all his servants, and told all these things in their ears: and the men were sore afraid.

Then Abimelech called Abraham, and said unto him, What hast thou done unto us? and what have I offended thee, that thou hast brought on me and on my kingdom a great sin? thou hast done deeds unto me that ought not to be done.

And Abimelech said unto Abraham, What sawest thou, that thou hast done this thing?

And Abraham said, Because I thought, Surely the fear of God *is* not in this place; and they will slay me for my wife's sake.

An Old Sin Repeated

And yet indeed *she is* my sister: she *is* the daughter of my father, but not the daughter of my mother; and she became my wife.

And it came to pass, when God caused me to wander from my father's house, that I said unto her, This *is* thy kindness which thou shalt shew unto me; at every place whither we shall come, say of me, He *is* my brother.

And Abimelech took sheep, and oxen, and men-servants, and women-servants, and gave *them* unto Abraham, and restored him Sarah his wife.

And Abimelech said, Behold, my land *is* before thee: dwell where it pleaseth thee.

And unto Sarah he said, Behold, I have given thy brother a thousand *pieces* of silver: behold, he *is* to thee a covering of the eyes, unto all that *are* with thee, and with all *other*. Thus she was reproved.

So Abraham prayed unto God; and God healed Abimelech, and his wife, and his maid-servants; and they bare *children*.

For the Lord had fast closed up all the wombs of the house of Abimelech because of Sarah, Abraham's wife.

Gen. xx.

THE continuance and power of the evil nature in believers are among the most patent and potent facts of universal spiritual experience. That the 'infection doth remain in the regenerate' is as certain as it is sad and serious. We have here a solemn example and warning of this in Abraham.

I. The Deplorable Sin (vers. 1, 2).

I. *The Deplorable Sin* (vers. 1, 2).—Abraham journeyed onward from Mamre (xviii. 1) towards the south, that southern district of Palestine known as the Negeb. This may have been due to the need of new pasturage for his increasing flocks, or it may have been caused by his call to a continued pilgrimage with no settled habitation in the Land of Promise. Some think that it was prompted by a desire to remove from the surroundings made so painful to him from the events recorded in chapter xix. His place of sojourning was Gerar, in the land of the Philistines.

Gen. xx.

As before (*cf.* chap. xii. 13) Abraham said that Sarah was his sister. Thus Abraham attempted to protect himself at the expense of his wife. This repetition of an old sin would be astonishing were it not for the close consistency it bears to human nature, even among the people of God. Believers are often found to slip and fall where they have fallen previously.

Abimelech, the King of Gerar, at once acted upon the information received about Sarah, and took her with the intention of making her his wife. He doubtless realised the value of an alliance with a powerful man like Abraham. It is sometimes said that this story is only a variation of that which is recorded in chapter xiii., and is not a separate incident, but the numerous variations in the narrative, as well as its place in the history of Abraham, disprove this theory. Besides, it is too true to human nature that a sin of this kind should be repeated to make it incredible that Abraham should again transgress.

II. The Divine Intervention (vers. 3-8).

II. *The Divine Intervention* (vers. 3-8).—Very appropriately we have the title 'God' employed (ver. 3) when the relation of God with the heathen is in question. 'Jehovah' is the Covenant Name. The Lord's intervention was for the purpose of preserving Sarah, and at the same time of fulfilling the Divine purposes concerning the seed. Thus God's children are saved from themselves.

It was necessary that Abimelech should be restrained from doing that which in all ignorance and innocence he was about to do. There was

also the thought of instruction and testimony concerning Abraham and his relation to God. Notwithstanding Abraham's sin, God would not allow him to be dishonoured in the face of the ungodly. Gen. xx.

The character of Abimelech shines out beautifully, and is in marked contrast with Abraham's at this point. Men of the world stand out superior at times to the people of God, and this is one of the great perplexities and problems of the spiritual realm. Abimelech's words bear witness to a true knowledge of God, and a genuine fear of God outside the covenant with Abraham (ver. 8). Abimelech had no intention of sinning, only of doing that which was perfectly natural to that age and state of life.

III. *The Deserved Rebuke* (vers. 9-16).—Again Abimelech's character and attitude shine as he reproaches Abraham with what he had done. It is very sad when a man of God has to be rebuked by a man of the world. III. The Deserved Rebuke (vers. 9-16).

There are three points in Abraham's statement by which he attempted to justify his conduct. (*a*) He thought there was no fear of God (ver. 11) in Abimelech and his people. We can see how distinctly he was mistaken on this point. (*b*) Sarah was really his sister; that is, a half-sister. Abraham here clearly crossed over the boundary between concealment and lying, and by suppressing the truth he suggested only too plainly what was false. (*c*) It was an old compact made thirty years ago (ver. 13). This, spoken in extenuation, really intensifies

Gen. xx. his sin, for it means that all through the thirty years of fellowship with God in Canaan this old compact had been in existence and never broken. How true, again, this is to experience! A believer often finds some old habit or sin cropping up, and if it is not at once dealt with it will assuredly bring trouble and sorrow.

Abimelech gave gifts to Abraham, doubtless as an acknowledgment and as a kind of propitiation of the wrong that would have been done. To Sarah also Abimelech addressed himself, telling her that the gifts which he had given to her husband were of a propitiatory kind, so that the recent events might be covered and forgotten. This must have been a very definite rebuke to Sarah, who, whatever the old compact may have meant, should have at once told Abimelech the true state of affairs. *N.B.*—Perhaps the words 'he is to thee' (ver. 16) should be rendered 'it is to thee,' referring to the gift rather than to Abraham.

All through we see the manifest moral superiority of a heathen man over children of God. When believers are out of the line of God's will they will sometimes go lower than other people. Abimelech is at his best. Abraham is at his worst. We must, of course, take care not to judge the entire life of either by this one incident, but the facts of the incident itself convey their own special lesson. How sad and deplorable it is when a believer does not keep in touch with God! 'The corruption of the best is the worst.' 'Tis true, 'tis pity; and pity 'tis 'tis true.'

IV. *The Definite Results* (vers. 17, 18).—In answer to prayer, God's blessing came down upon Abimelech and his household. Thus God overruled these sad mistakes and brought blessing.

IV. The Definite Results (vers. 17, 18).

Sarah's position as Abraham's wife was preserved, and she would still be the instrument of fulfilling God's purposes by means of the promised seed.

Divine protection was vouchsafed to Abraham, and his sin overruled by the mercy and love of God. If God had not interposed on His servant's behalf what an unspeakable catastrophe would have been the result!

Suggestions for Meditation.

1. *The possibilities of sin in believers.*—It is almost incredible, after the experiences recorded in chapters xv. and xviii., that Abraham should have sinned in this way against God. Notice the elements included in this sin: (*a*) The fear of man; (*b*) innate selfishness; (*c*) deliberate untruth; (*d*) distrust of God through fear of circumstances. And what a degradation it was to be rebuked by a man of the world! It is truly a picture full of sadness and shame.

2. *The perils of sin in believers.*—There was peril to Abraham *himself.* Old habits broke out afresh which had been restrained and kept in the background for years. This is often a believer's experience. Former weaknesses and inveterate tendencies which we think no longer powerful suddenly arise and bring about our downfall. There is also a peril to our *fellow-believers* through

Gen. xx. our example. What a bad influence on Sarah! Younger Christians are shocked, and even led into sin, when they see an old believer fall. There is also a peril to the *world,* for the sin of a child of God dishonours God, and so far prevents the world from being impressed with the Divine character.

3. *The persistence of sin in believers.*—Abraham's experience proves New Testament truth that the old nature abides in the believer to the very end. Nowhere in Scripture is there any warrant for the idea that the root of sin is taken out in this life. The teaching of Article IX. of the Church of England is in exact correspondence with the Word of God. Neither in the regenerate nor in the sanctified (a distinction often made, but without warrant) is 'the infection of nature' taken away. The realisation of this solemn and patent fact would save many a believer from spiritual trouble.

4. *The protection against sin in believers.*—God took Abraham's part before Abimelech, but assuredly must have dealt very differently with him in private. The believer's standing before God is one thing; his state is quite another. While God's people are all 'accepted in the Beloved,' they are not all equally *acceptable to* the Beloved, and the question of protection against indwelling sin is vital for Christian living. This protection God has provided in abundant sufficiency for every need. The promise is clear: 'Sin shall not have dominion over you.' God's provision of power is in union with the death of Christ, and this, by the power of the Spirit, affords

the guarantee of perpetual protection and victory. Gen. xx.
This provision must, however, be used. We are to 'live in the Spirit and walk in the Spirit' (Gal. v. 25). 'The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus' is the law, not of eradication, but of counteraction. If we will live and walk in the Spirit we shall not yield to and fulfil the lusts of the flesh (Gal. v. 16). Full surrender to the Holy Spirit will keep the inner being sensitive to the approaches of sin. We shall become conscious of the Satanic devices to lead us astray ; and as we continue to yield ourselves to the incoming, full possession, and entire control of the Spirit of God the old nature will be kept under, the new life will have complete power, and we shall be 'more than conquerors through Him that loves us.'

XXVII

JOY AND SORROW

Gen. xxi. 1-21

And the Lord visited Sarah as He had said, and the Lord did unto Sarah as He had spoken.

For Sarah conceived, and bare Abraham a son in his old age, at the set time of which God had spoken to him.

And Abraham called the name of his son that was born unto him, whom Sarah bare to him, Isaac.

And Abraham circumcised his son Isaac, being eight days old, as God had commanded him.

And Abraham was an hundred years old, when his son Isaac was born unto him.

And Sarah said, God hath made me to laugh, *so that* all that hear will laugh with me.

And she said, Who would have said unto Abraham, that Sarah should have given children suck? for I have born *him* a son in his old age.

And the child grew, and was weaned: and Abraham made a great feast the *same* day that Isaac was weaned.

And Sarah saw the son of Hagar the Egyptian, which she had born unto Abraham, mocking.

Wherefore she said unto Abraham, Cast out this bondwoman and her son: for the son of this bondwoman shall not be heir with my son, *even* with Isaac.

And the thing was very grievous in Abraham's sight because of his son.

And God said unto Abraham, Let it not be grievous in thy sight because of the lad, and because of thy bondwoman; in all that Sarah hath said unto thee, hearken unto her voice; for in Isaac shall thy seed be called.

And also of the son of the bondwoman will I make a nation, because he *is* thy seed.

And Abraham rose up early in the morning, and took bread,

and a bottle of water, and gave *it* unto Hagar (putting *it* on her shoulder), and the child, and sent her away: and she departed, and wandered in the wilderness of Beer-sheba.

And the water was spent in the bottle, and she cast the child under one of the shrubs.

And she went, and sat her down over against *him* a good way off, as it were a bow-shot: for she said, Let me not see the death of the child. And she sat over against *him*, and lift up her voice, and wept.

And God heard the voice of the lad: and the angel of God called to Hagar out of heaven, and said unto her, What aileth thee, Hagar? fear not; for God hath heard the voice of the lad where he *is*.

Arise, lift up the lad, and hold him in thine hand; for I will make him a great nation.

And God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water; and she went, and filled the bottle with water, and gave the lad drink.

And God was with the lad; and he grew, and dwelt in the wilderness, and became an archer.

And he dwelt in the wilderness of Paran: and his mother took him a wife out of the land of Egypt.

Gen. xxi. 1-21.

THE believer never comes, never can come, to a point in his experience when God has nothing new to teach him or to give to him. Further and deeper lessons come constantly, lessons about God and about life in relation to Him. This is now very clearly and strikingly brought before us in connection with Abraham.

I. The Promised Seed (vers. 1-8).

I. *The Promised Seed* (vers. 1-8).—At last the word of God was fulfilled, and Sarah received the long-promised son. Her joy can readily be understood, and it is suggestive to see the emphasis upon the Lord's action being in strict accordance with His word. 'The Lord did . . . as He had spoken' (ver. 1). 'At the set time of which God had spoken' (ver. 2). The comment of the Apostle is very significant in this connection. According to the

Gen. xxi. 1-21.

Authorised Version (Rom. iv. 19) Abraham 'considered not his own body now dead,' implying that his faith disregarded the physical circumstances which, humanly speaking, might make it impossible for God to do as He had promised. According to the Revised Version, which omits the negative, and reads, 'He considered his own body now dead,' we have a still more striking suggestion as to his faith, for it implies that he deliberately thought on the subject of his own age and circumstances, and, notwithstanding this careful consideration, he exercised faith in God and His Word. And now at length this faith was justified, and God was true to His promise.

The naming of the child 'Isaac' and his circumcision were two prompt and definite proofs of Abraham's thorough trust in God. As already seen (chap. xvii.), the root idea of circumcision is designation, God marking off the life as belonging to Him.

Sarah now laughs the laugh of joy and satisfaction. The fulfilment of the promise was almost too good to be true; and yet it *was* true, as she shows by her joyous surprise. She doubtless remembers her former laugh of incredulity (chap. xviii. 13) as well as Abraham's laugh of faith and hope (chap. xvii. 17).

In due course the child was weaned; according to Eastern custom, at a much later date than in Western lands. Isaac must have been at least three, if not five, years old when this event took

place. Abraham made a great feast to celebrate this occasion. The difference between East and West in this matter, and the spiritual ideas associated with it, can be seen from a careful comparison of Psalm cxxxi. 2; Isaiah xxviii. 9; Matt. xxi. 16.

Gen. xxi. 1-21.

II. *The Profound Sadness* (vers. 9-11).—The results of Abraham's sin as to Hagar now show themselves acutely. Up to the time of Isaac's birth Ishmael occupied the foremost place in Abraham's life, but now he has to give place to Isaac. The disappointment to a growing and wild lad of seventeen must have been keen, and we are not surprised to read of his mockery of the little child. St Paul (Gal. iv. 29) speaks of the action of Ishmael as 'persecuting,' and no wonder, from Ishmael's point of view, since Isaac's arrival meant that he was robbed of his former position.

II. The Profound Sadness (vers. 9-11).

Sarah was quick to see this action of Ishmael, and resented it. It was now her turn to do what Hagar had done under similar circumstances. Thus the tangled web becomes still more tangled as jealousy, anger, and malice bear their sad fruit.

Sarah at once demands that Hagar and Ishmael shall be cast out. The terms in which she speaks of 'this bondwoman and her son' show the pitiable spirit of jealousy and anger. She insists that Ishmael shall not be heir with her son, as though Abraham had any idea of the two boys being co-heirs. Sarah had either forgotten, or else

Gen. xxi. 1-21.

distrusted God's definite promise about Isaac's sole heirship (chap. xvii. 21).

It is no surprise that this was a poignant grief to Abraham. After all, Ishmael was his own child, and for seventeen years had been the joy and light of his life.

III. The Perfect Strength (vers. 12-14).

III. *The Perfect Strength* (vers. 12-14).—We are now to see how God interposed amidst this strife and sorrow, overruling His children's mistakes and sin, and doing the very best that was possible for them.

We can hear the voice of God comforting him (ver. 12). God urged Abraham not to grieve. In all ages God's cheering message to His people has been 'Let not your heart be troubled.'

We can observe the wisdom of God guiding him (ver. 12). God tells Abraham to listen to what Sarah had said. Her counsel is to be followed, even though her conduct could not be approved. Ishmael's presence in the home would doubtless have been an ever-increasing difficulty, and a very genuine hindrance to the complete realisation of God's will and purposes for Isaac. Thus in sending Ishmael away Abraham was really removing the cause of possible failure in regard to Isaac. Moreover, Ishmael had arrived, or would soon arrive, at a point in his life where he would need room to grow, and a change would therefore be good for him as well.

We can mark the promise of God encouraging him (ver. 13). God would not forget Ishmael, and he also was to become a great nation because of his relationship to Abraham. It is interesting to

notice this reason assigned by God for His care of Ishmael. It is 'because' he is the child of one of God's children. Thus Abraham was encouraged to do what must have been one of the hardest things in his experience, to put away from him his own child, and to realise that that child was no longer to be in any close and definite sense part of his life. Gen. xxi. 1-21.

We can see the servant of God responding (ver. 14). Abraham at once obeys the Divine word. We see him rising up early in the morning, and with thoughtfulness and tenderness he bids Hagar and Ishmael farewell. It requires very little imagination to enter into his feelings as he saw them depart, realising that a break had come into his life which could never be altered or set aside. It is striking to notice the entire absence of any remonstrance on the part of Hagar. She seems to have taken everything quietly. Ishmael, too, although seventeen years old, showed no signs of rebellion. Perhaps there was something behind which would explain all, as, indeed, seems to be hinted at in the Apostolic treatment of this incident (Gal. iv.).

Suggestions for Meditation.

1. *The unchanging faithfulness of God.*—The birth of Isaac was a beautiful and striking reminder that God is ever true to His word. 'As He had spoken' is the keynote of the narrative. This is the experience of God's people in all ages. Joshua said that not one thing had failed of all that God had spoken; all had come to pass (Josh. xxi. 45;

Gen. xxi. 1-21.

xxiii. 14). This is the bedrock of the believer's life. 'God is faithful.' A careful study of all the passages of the New Testament (and they are not few) which bring before us the faithfulness of God will show the prominence of this great truth in the Bible. 'He abideth faithful'; and the more closely we enter into fellowship with Him through His Word, the more definitely we shall realise the preciousness of this great fact. 'The counsel of the Lord standeth for ever, the thoughts of His heart to all generations' (Ps. xxxiii. 11).

2. *The perfect wisdom of God.*—We can easily realise the aching heart and troubled spirit of Abraham as he prepared to bid farewell to Ishmael, and yet, the initial mistake having been made (chap. xvi.), this severance was really the very best thing that could have happened for all concerned. Discipleship always involves *discipline*, and discipline is always necessary to spiritual blessing. God was taking up the tangled threads of His servant's life, weaving them into His own Divine pattern, and overruling everything for good. Happy for us if, like the Apostle Paul, we can rest our hearts day by day on 'the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God' (Rom. xi. 33).

3. *The absolute sufficiency of God.* — God's call to Abraham was met by Divine grace sufficient for his need. The Lord never puts upon His people more than they are able to bear. He encourages them by His promises,

He assures them of His presence and power, and in response to all these encouragements His people yield trustful obedience, and find that His grace is sufficient for them. 'As thy days, so shall thy strength be.' Gen. xxi. 1-21.

XXVIII

THE DAILY ROUND

Gen. xxi. 22-34

And it came to pass at that time, that Abimelech and Phichol the chief captain of his host spake unto Abraham, saying, God *is* with thee in all that thou doest:

Now therefore swear unto me here by God that thou wilt not deal falsely with me, nor with my son, nor with my son's son: *but* according to the kindness that I have done unto thee, thou shalt do unto me, and to the land wherein thou hast sojourned.

And Abraham said, I will swear.

And Abraham reproved Abimelech because of a well of water, which Abimelech's servants had violently taken away.

And Abimelech said, I wot not who hath done this thing: neither didst thou tell me, neither yet heard I *of it*, but to-day.

And Abraham took sheep and oxen, and gave them unto Abimelech; and both of them made a covenant.

And Abraham set seven ewe lambs of the flock by themselves.

And Abimelech said unto Abraham, What *mean* these seven ewe lambs which thou hast set by themselves?

And he said, For *these* seven ewe lambs shalt thou take of my hand, that they may be a witness unto me, that I have digged this well.

Wherefore he called that place Beer-sheba; because there they sware both of them.

Thus they made a covenant at Beer-sheba: then Abimelech rose up, and Phichol the chief captain of his host, and they returned into the land of the Philistines.

And *Abraham* planted a grove in Beer-sheba, and called there on the name of the Lord, the everlasting God.

And Abraham sojourned in the Philistines' land many days.

Gen. xxi. 22-34.

THE ordinary uneventful days of a believer's life are usually a better test of his true character than an emergency or crisis. It is sometimes possible

to face a great occasion with wisdom and courage, and yet to fail in some simple, average experiences of daily living. We have already had illustrations of what Abraham could do in great crises and striking situations. We shall now see him in an ordinary episode, and be able to consider some of the elements of his inner life and character.

Gen. xxi. 22-34.

I. *A Striking Testimony* (ver. 22).—Abimelech, King of Gerar, together with Phichol, the chief captain of his host, came to Abraham on a special errand, using the striking words, 'God is with thee in all that thou doest.' 'Abimelech' is probably a title of a dynasty, like 'Pharaoh' (*cf.* xx. 2; xxvi. 1, 16). 'Phichol' also seems to be an official title answering to 'Vizier' (*cf.* xxvi. 26).

I. A Striking Testimony (ver. 22).

This testimony to God's presence with Abraham seems to have been based on the occurrences of chapter xx. and on Abimelech's subsequent experiences of Abraham's life and prosperity. It showed that the patriarch's daily life was a genuine witness for God. The fact that a heathen king should be able to draw this conclusion clearly indicates the genuineness and reality of Abraham's life.

II. *A Significant Request* (ver. 23).—Abimelech, realising the presence of God with Abraham, is specially desirous of peace for himself, his kindred, and his land. He therefore appeals to Abraham to take a solemn oath to insure this result. Abimelech also reminds him of their past intercourse, and the kindness shown on a former occasion (xx. 15).

II. A Significant Request (ver. 23).

Abimelech is evidently afraid of Abraham's

Gen. xxi. 23-24.

power, and this, with his growing prosperity and influence, might easily lead to difficulty, and even differences, in the immediate future. Perhaps, too, Abimelech might not have felt quite satisfied about Abraham's future attitude in the light of his former experiences. Yet it is very probable that religious influence was not wanting as a reason for making this request. Abimelech was finding out what many others have found out since his day, that the friendship of good men is often an advantage, even in things temporal.

III. A Sincere Response (ver. 24).

III. *A Sincere Response* (ver. 24).—At once Abraham responds to the invitation of Abimelech, and shows his readiness to do as the heathen king desires. He expresses his readiness and determination to take the oath required, and to give the solemn undertaking that there shall be peace between him and Abimelech. Abraham stands out at this point to distinct advantage. He is truly a man of God, and shows this by his heartiness and willingness in meeting the desires and fears of Abimelech. His readiness would at once go far to show that he was not bent on any conquest or purely selfish ends.

IV. A Serious Remonstrance (ver. 25).

IV. *A Serious Remonstrance* (ver. 25).—Abraham now points out one difficulty in the way and clearly implies that any compact of peace is really impossible until the difficulty is settled. Abimelech's servants had violently taken away a well of water which belonged to Abraham, and it was with reference to this that Abraham complained. Water was everything to nomadic

tribes, and its absence necessarily involved the greatest possible inconvenience, injury, and loss. Gen. xxi. 23-24.

The fact that Abimelech's servants had dealt unjustly with the well has suggested to some writers that the well may have been made by Abraham for the convenience of Ishmael when he was sent out from his father's home, and that Abimelech's servants were not aware of the connection of Ishmael with Abraham. This is a very probable explanation, though at the same time it is equally likely that in the movement of their flocks and herds the servants of Abimelech might easily have trespassed in Abraham's neighbourhood. Such disputes have always been very common.

V. *A Satisfactory Explanation* (ver. 26).—Abimelech, however, disclaims all knowledge of what had been done. He was entirely ignorant of the action of his servants. Thus, so far as Abimelech is concerned, a simple misunderstanding is at the root of Abraham's remonstrance. How often this is the case between friends and neighbours! Happy are they who are enabled to clear away misunderstandings as quickly and as easily as these two. V. A Satisfactory Explanation (ver. 26).

Abimelech not only disclaims knowledge and responsibility, but complains of Abraham for not telling him of this. The man is evidently sincere, upright, and genuine, a fine specimen of natural goodness, apart from the special spiritual revelation involved in the Abrahamic covenant.

VI. *A Solemn Covenant* (ver. 27-32).—Abraham thereupon sets before Abimelech the usual covenant presents (verse 27. *Cf.* 1 Kings xv. 19; VI. A Solemn Covenant (vers. 27-32).

Gen. xxi. 23-24.

Hosea xii. 1). Then he sets seven lambs of the flock by themselves, and, on being asked why this difference was made, he replies that they are a special gift, an additional security for the future with reference to the well (verse 30).

Abraham then calls the name of the place 'Beer-sheba,' which may mean 'the well of the oath' or 'the well of the seven.' There is an etymological connection between the Hebrew words for 'swear' and 'seven,' probably because of the seven sacrifices (ver. 28). It is, however, very interesting to know that seven wells have actually been found at the place which has been identified with Beersheba, twelve hours south-west of Hebron. Thus the covenant is made, and the two men become united in a solemn compact of brotherhood and peace. Abimelech and Phichol return to their country. Abraham remains at Beer-sheba.

VII. A Special Revelation (vers. 33, 34).

VII. *A Special Revelation* (vers. 33, 34).—Abraham now adds on his own account another testimony to his recent experiences. He plants a grove, probably a tamarisk tree, one of the evergreens of the East, and a fit memorial of the perfect peace which he desired between himself, his God, and his fellow-men. But now there came a new revelation of the meaning of his relation to God. In the course of his prayer and communion he learnt a new Name of God, and the new Name was no mere additional title, but contained a new truth about God; 'the Everlasting God' (*El Olam*). He was thus reminded of God's unchangeableness and his dependableness. This was a distinct ad-

vance on his previous knowledge of God as 'Most High' (xiv. 22), and 'Almighty' (xvii. 1). Thus, in the course of Abraham's daily life and his faithful attitude to those around him, came fresh mercies and blessings and new experiences of his God. Gen. xxi. 22-34.

Suggestions for Meditation.

1. *The spiritual value of ordinary everyday life.*—It is impossible for Christians to be ever living in a constant succession of crises and great occasions. These exceptional experiences must of necessity be very rare. Ordinary life is the normal experience of the overwhelming majority of God's people; and 'the trivial round, the common task, will furnish all we need to ask' of opportunities for faithfulness, as well as of experience of God. The prophet Isaiah seems to suggest the three general experiences of life (xl. 31)—(*a*) There is the exceptional moment of exalted communion with God; 'mount up with wings as eagles.' (*b*) There is the special emergency; 'they shall run.' (*c*) There is the ordinary, normal, average, daily life; 'they shall walk.' The last-named is at once the hardest and really the most blessed. Ordinary is, after all, the 'ordered,' and therefore the truly 'ordained' life. If we wait for great occasions in order to show our character we shall utterly fail to do God's will. It is for us to make every occasion great by faithful loyalty to His grace.

2. *The true attitude of believers to 'them that are without.'*—This episode is a helpful illustration of the relation of God's people to those who are not yet within the fold. The Apostle urges us more

Gen. xxi. 22-34.

than once to live in view of the non-Christians around us. 'Walk in wisdom toward them that are without' (Col. iv. 5). 'Walk becomingly toward them that are without' (1 Thess. iv. 12). 'A good report of them which are without' (1 Tim. iii. 7). The very phrase 'them that are *without*' tells of the unutterable sadness and loss of being outside the fold and separated from all the great privileges of grace in Christ Jesus. This fact alone should make us the more careful to live aright in order that those who are now without may be attracted to come within. And, further, as a witness for God and His grace it is of the utmost necessity that we should 'walk circumspectly,' or, as St Paul more literally wrote, 'walk accurately' (Eph. v. 15), 'providing things beautiful [or attractive] in the sight of all men' (Rom. xii. 17, Greek).

3. *The unspeakable blessedness of new experiences of God.*—A profound satisfaction is realised by the believer as he discovers more and more of the glories of God and His grace. The believer is 'ever learning,' and from the moment of his conversion, in proportion to his faithful obedience day by day, God becomes better known in all the fulness and manifold variety of His revelation. These new experiences as they come are, however, not merely a matter of personal satisfaction, blessed though that is; they tend to prepare the soul for still greater accomplishments. God's revelations are not mere luxuries for personal enjoyment, but are given for the purpose of preparing the soul for fuller service and still clearer testimony for God.

We shall see how this new revelation of God to Abraham was a distinct preparation for a crisis that was to come in his life. It is the same to-day. God reveals Himself more and more fully in order that we may be more and more thoroughly equipped for greater efforts in the kingdom of God.

Gen. xxi. 22-34.

XXIX

THE SUPREME CRISIS

Gen. xxii. 1-19

And it came to pass after these things that God did tempt Abraham, and said unto him, Abraham: and he said, Behold, *here* I *am*.

And he said, Take now thy son, thine only *son* Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of.

And Abraham rose up early in the morning, and saddled his ass, and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son, and clave the wood for the burnt offering, and rose up, and went unto the place of which God had told him.

Then on the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes, and saw the place afar off.

And Abraham said unto his young men, Abide ye here with the ass; and I and the lad will go yonder and worship, and come again to you.

And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering, and laid *it* upon Isaac his son: and he took the fire in his hand, and a knife; and they went both of them together.

And Isaac spake unto Abraham his father, and said, My father: and he said, Here *am* I, my son. And he said, Behold the fire and the wood: but where *is* the lamb for a burnt offering?

And Abraham said, My son, God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt offering; so they went both of them together.

And they came to the place which God had told him of; and Abraham built an altar there, and laid the wood in order, and bound Isaac his son, and laid him on the altar upon the wood.

And Abraham stretched forth his hand, and took the knife to slay his son.

And the angel of the Lord called unto him out of heaven, and said, Abraham, Abraham: and he said, Here *am* I.

And he said, Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou

anything unto him: for now I know thát thou fearest God, seeing that thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only *son*, from me.

And Abraham lifted up his eyes, and looked, and behold behind *him* a ram caught in a thicket by his horns: and Abraham went and took the ram, and offered him up for a burnt offering in the stead of his son.

And Abraham called the name of that place Jehovah-jireh: as it is said *to* this day, In the mount of the Lord it shall be seen.

And the angel of the Lord called unto Abraham out of heaven the second time,

And said, By myself have I sworn, saith the Lord, for because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only *son*:

That in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which *is* upon the sea shore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies;

And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice.

So Abraham returned unto his young men, and they rose up and went together to Beer-sheba: and Abraham dwelt at Beer-sheba.

LIFE is a succession of tests, for character is only possible through discipline. In many lives there is some supreme test to which all others are secondary and preparatory. It was so with Abraham, and we are now to consider the record of the crowning event of his life. For him it was the avenue leading to his closest fellowship with God and his greatest spiritual blessing. For us to-day it still reveals the secret of spiritual power and victory. Gen. xxii. 1-19.

I. *The Test* (vers. 1, 2).—The time is noteworthy. 'After these things.' It was immediately after the new experiences of God recorded in the former chapter (xxi. 33, 34). It is frequently the case that severe tests follow special times of blessing. Our Lord's temptation followed immediately upon I. The Test (vers. 1, 2).

Gen. xxii. 1-19.

the spiritual experiment of His baptism, and the two events are closely associated by the Evangelists (Matt. iv. 1; Luke iv. 1). Discipline thus proves whether our spiritual experiences have really become part of our life and character, instead of being mere temporary enjoyments and luxuries.

What are we to understand by the words, 'God did tempt Abraham'? The word 'test' better expresses the Divine intention and action. God tests us to bring out the good. Satan tempts us to bring out the evil (James i. 12-15).

The description (ver. 2) is worthy of careful notice: 'Thy son, thine only son, whom thou lovest, even Isaac.' (R.V.). Thus by point after point Abraham is reminded of the dearest possession of his life, and is asked to give to God his best. Trials that are put upon us with no reason given at the time are the severest tests of all. They call for absolute unquestioning faith, and when responded to in this spirit invariably lead the soul higher and nearer to God. Moriah is mentioned again only once (2 Chron. iii. 1), where the reference is to one of the mountains on which Jerusalem is situated. Some writers think that, as the journey from Beer-sheba to Jerusalem would only take about seventeen hours, it is impossible to believe that Mount Moriah is intended in this chapter. At the same time the tradition that this was the spot is at least as old as Josephus, and, to say nothing of its spiritual appropriateness in view of Calvary, there does not seem any valid reason for rejecting it.

II. *The Trial* (vers. 3-10). — The alacrity of Abraham's reply to God's call is very striking, and is evidently intended to be regarded as a prominent feature of the narrative. Some writers are fond of depicting his silent agony, and emphasising that he did not tell Sarah a word of what God had ordered. There is, however, nothing of this in the narrative. No reluctance, no hesitation, no doubt mark Abraham at this point. He 'made haste, and delayed not' to keep God's commandment (Ps. cxix. 60). He 'conferred not with flesh and blood' (Gal. i. 16). This alacrity should be borne in mind as one of the leading and most significant points of the story.

On the third day Abraham came to the end of his journey. His words to the young men need special attention (verse 5). 'Abide ye here . . . I and the lad will go yonder and worship, and come again to you.' It is therefore evident that Abraham fully expected Isaac would come back with him. The conversation between the father and the son is noteworthy and beautiful. The son's natural question about the lamb is followed by the father's whole-hearted and confident reply that God will provide it. Notice the repetition of the phrase in verses 6 and 8, 'they went both of them together.'

The part of Isaac in this matter is always a subject of great interest. Was there any concurrence on his part? It must be remembered that he had already arrived at man's estate. Probably as they neared the place Abraham revealed to his son what God had commanded, and also told him what he

Gen. xxii. 1-19.

himself expected as the result of that command. There is no idea in Abraham's mind that he is doing wrong in sacrificing his son. He was familiar with the practice of human sacrifices from the Canaanites around him, and there was consequently no shock to his conscience in this command. As to the Divine aspect of it, it must be ever remembered that God accommodates His instructions to the moral and spiritual standards of the people at any given time. He knew the end from the beginning, and that He never meant Isaac to be sacrificed. What God desired was not Isaac's life but Abraham's loyalty, thus separating between the false and the true in relation to human sacrifice.

III. The Triumph (vers. 11-14).

III. *The Triumph* (vers. 11-14).—At the right moment and not before (Ps. cvii. 27, 28), God interposed and stayed Abraham's hand. By this action God bore unmistakable testimony to the error of the heathen as to human sacrifices, and it is a striking fact that from this time forward the Jews never adopted the practice of human sacrifices until they had sunk to the level of the heathen around them. In this respect the superiority of the Old Testament to the worship and practices of the heathen around is evident to all. God could not have given a better object lesson as to the sin of sacrificing our offspring with the thought that it would be pleasing to Him. God sets His seal upon His servant's faith, and says, 'Now I know that thou fearest God.' Abraham was prepared to give God his very best. Faith can do no more.

Abraham not only finds that God interposes to prevent him from killing his son, but that his word to his son, 'God will provide,' is also literally fulfilled. The ram was offered up as a burnt offering in the stead of Isaac. Gen. xxii. 1-19.

'Abraham called the name of the place Jehovah-jireh,' thus bearing his testimony to the reality of God's presence and provision. 'The Lord will see to it.' This was the secret and assurance of Abraham's faith, and the same is true to-day. As God has saved our souls and made us His own children and servants, so assuredly with reference to the whole of our life 'The Lord will see to it' (*cf.* Rom v. 10). The place became sanctified to Abraham by a very holy and blessed memory. It is well when we can look back over life's pathway and point to a particular place or time when God revealed Himself to us in blessing.

IV. *The Testimony* (vers. 15-19).—Again the Voice from heaven was heard. It called to Abraham and acknowledged what had been done: 'Because thou hast done this.' God clearly teaches the patriarch that He regarded the sacrifice as actually offered. The will was taken for the deed. IV. The Testimony (vers. 15-19).

God now introduces a renewal of the promises by a specially solemn oath: 'By Myself have I sworn.' This expression is only found very rarely in Scripture, and indicates the most solemn oath possible (Isaiah xlv. 23; Jer. xxii. 5; xlix. 13; Heb. vi. 13, 14). These promises should be compared with those given on the former occasions (chaps. xii. 2, 3; xiii. 16; xv. 5; xvii. 4-8).

Gen. xxii. 1-19.

We can easily picture the glad satisfaction with which Abraham returned to the young men with Isaac his son. He had said they would come back, and they had. He had proved that God was true, and, having loyally accepted and fulfilled God's will, he was filled with joy and peace.

Suggestions for Meditation.

1. *The simplicity of faith.*—Faith in the case of Abraham, as indeed in every other instance, is taking God at His word. True faith is nothing more, as it is nothing less, than this. God speaks: man believes. This is the true idea involved in the phrase 'implicit trust,' a trust that relies upon God without having his reasons 'unfolded' to us. This simple faith, taking God at His word, is always at the foundation of the believer's peace and restfulness, strength and progress.

2. *The strength of faith.*—The entire absence from the narrative of any suggestions about Abraham's emotions or self-sacrifice is surely very significant. He had received certain promises from God about his son, and he was perfectly certain that those promises would be fulfilled. In the strength of this assurance he went forward, his attitude being that of Job: 'Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him' (Job xiii. 15). Abraham's faith showed its strength in the way in which he fully expected his son Isaac to return with him to the young men (ver. 5). 'We will come again to you.' Nothing can affect the force of this splendid expectation of Abraham. What, then, did the words imply? Simply this: that

whilst he believed at that moment that God intended him to slay his son, he nevertheless felt perfectly certain that God would there and then raise Isaac from the dead and send him back alive. Only thus could Abraham then see that the promises concerning his seed were to be fulfilled. What a magnificent exercise of faith this was! There had never been such an event as a resurrection, and so Abraham had no previous example to suggest this result or to encourage his faith thereby. But with a splendid sweep of God-given imagination, based upon God's personal relation to him, he said to himself, 'God will raise my son from the dead.' Gen. xxii. 1-19.

3. *The source of faith.*—The foundation of this remarkable confidence was Abraham's conviction of the power of God: 'Accounting that God was able' (Heb. xi. 17-19). The whole passage from the Epistle to the Hebrews shows that this is the true explanation of this incident, and so far from this view being, as is sometimes alleged, a mere *coup de théâtre*, it was in reality a marvellous exercise of faith when it is remembered that no instance had then been known of God's power being exercised in the resurrection from the dead. God was such a reality to Abraham, and His promises were so certain, that the patriarch at once drew the inevitable and natural conclusion that God's power could and would effect this.

4. *The secret of faith.* — How was it that Abraham was able to exercise this unquestioning and even astonishing trust in God? The explana-

Gen. xxii. 1-19.

tion is found in the phrase, which occurs twice in this chapter, 'Here am I.' Abraham lived in close fellowship with God, ready for His new revelations and responsive to His continual calls. Abiding close to God, he learnt more and more of the character of the One with Whom he was in covenant. 'The secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him,' and when we thus abide in Him He abides in us, and our faith grows strong, our love grows deep, our hope grows high. Then it is we 'stagger not through unbelief' (Rom. iv. 20), and we are able to say: 'The Lord God will help me; therefore shall I not be confounded; therefore have I set my face like a flint, and I know that I shall not be ashamed' (Isaiah l. 7).

XXX

DEATH IN THE HOME

Gen. xxiii.

And Sarah was an hundred and seven and twenty years old: *these were* the years of the life of Sarah.

And Sarah died in Kirjath-arba; the same *is* Hebron in the land of Canaan: and Abraham came to mourn for Sarah, and to weep for her.

And Abraham stood up from before his dead, and spake unto the sons of Heth, saying,

I *am* a stranger and a sojourner with you: give me a possession of a buryingplace with you, that I may bury my dead out of my sight.

And the children of Heth answered Abraham, saying unto him.

Hear us, my lord: thou *art* a mighty prince among us: in the choice of our sepulchres bury thy dead; none of us shall withhold from thee his sepulchre, but that thou mayest bury thy dead.

And Abraham stood up, and bowed himself to the people of the land, *even* to the children of Heth.

And he communed with them, saying, If it be your mind that I should bury my dead out of my sight; hear me and intreat for me to Ephron, the son of Zohar.

That he may give me the cave of Machpelah, which he hath, which *is* in the end of his field; for as much money as it is worth he shall give it me for a possession of a buryingplace amongst you.

And Ephron dwelt amongst the children of Heth: and Ephron the Hittite answered Abraham in the audience of the children of Heth, *even* of all that went in at the gate of his city, saying,

Nay, my lord, hear me: the field give I thee, and the cave that *is* therein, I give it thee; and in the presence of the sons of my people give I it thee: bury thy dead.

And Abraham bowed down himself before the people of the land.

And he spake unto Ephron in the audience of the people of the land, saying, But if thou *wilt give it*, I pray thee, hear me: I will give thee money for the field; take *it* of me, and I will bury my dead there.

And Ephron answered Abraham, saying unto him,

My lord, hearken unto me: the land *is worth* four hundred shekels of silver; what *is* that betwixt me and thee? bury therefore thy dead.

And Abraham hearkened unto Ephron; and Abraham weighed to Ephron the silver, which he had named in the audience of the sons of Heth, four hundred shekels of silver, current *money* with the merchant.

And the field of Ephron, which *was* in Machpelah, which *was* before Mamre, the field, and the cave which *was* therein, and all the trees that *were* in the field, that *were* in all the borders round about, were made sure

Unto Abraham for a possession in the presence of the children of Heth, before all that went in at the gate of his city.

And after this, Abraham buried Sarah his wife in the cave of the field of Machpelah before Mamre: the same *is* Hebron in the land of Canaan.

And the field, and the cave that *is* therein, were made sure unto Abraham for a possession of a buryingplace by the sons of Heth.

Gen. xxiii. AFTER the great crisis (Gen. xxii.) Abraham had twenty-five years of apparent uneventful life. Three scenes illustrative of home and personal experiences are successively brought before us: (*a*) the news of relatives from afar (chap. xxii. 20-24); (*b*) the death of the wife and mother (chap. xxiii.); (*c*) the marriage of the son (chap. xxiv.) We are now to consider the second of these, the death of Sarah.

I. Death (vers. 1, 2). I. *Death* (vers. 1, 2).—At the age of one hundred and twenty-seven, forty years after the birth of Isaac (Gen. xviii. 12), Sarah died. She is the only woman whose age is recorded in the Bible. The following points with reference to her death are worthy of consideration and meditation.

It was the death of a believer. Certain hints in the story suggest that Sarah's spiritual life and experience were not quite on the high level of her husband's, but at the same time it is equally evident that her spiritual life was real, and her faith in the promises of God strong. The New Testament also adds its witness to the fact of Sarah's spiritual oneness with Abraham (Heb. xi. 11-13; 1 Pet. iii. 5, 6). Gen. xxiii.

It was the death of a life-long companion. For sixty years Sarah had lived in Canaan with Abraham, and with the exception of the incident about Hagar, which was itself prompted by Sarah, nothing marred the fellowship of these two as husband and wife. They afford to us a picture of true married life, a husband and wife united in the Lord and in each other in Him.

It was the death of a mother. To Isaac the death of Sarah was a very great loss. Although he was now nearly forty years of age, he had always lived at home and was the recipient of his mother's love and devotion and the subject of her constant hope and prayer. We are distinctly told of his sorrow on her death (chap. xxiv. 67).

It was a death in the home. The removal of one member of a household, especially if that member is a beloved wife and mother, causes a blank which nothing else can fill. The quiet influence of such a life in the home is of untold value, and the loss at death is proportionately great.

II. *Sorrow* (ver. 2).—Sarah's life came to its end at Hebron, and it would almost seem from II. Sorrow (ver. 2).

Gen. xxiii. the words 'Abraham came to mourn' that he was away at the time of her death. It is possible, if not probable, that Abraham had two establishments with separate flocks and herds, one at Beersheba (chap. xxii. 19), and the other at Hebron, where Sarah then was.

This is the first occasion in Scripture of the record of a man's tears, and they were neither idle, nor unmanly, nor morbid, but the genuine and rightful expression of Abraham's deep sorrow on the death of his wife.

III. Duty (ver. 3).

III. *Duty* (ver. 3).—There is danger lest sorrow overwhelm us and we should give way beyond measure. The great safeguard against this danger is work. So Abraham rose up and applied to the children of Heth with reference to a burial-place.

Abraham's desire for a resting-place for the body of his wife is a simple but striking testimony to the innate feelings about the care of the body. The possessive pronouns, 'his dead' (ver. 3), 'my dead' (ver. 4), 'thy dead' (ver. 6), are very noteworthy in this connection. The body of his beloved wife was precious to him and was regarded by him and by others as his own property, of which he was about to take special and loving care.

IV. Faith (vers. 4-18).

IV. *Faith* (vers. 4-18).—The dialogue between Abraham and the sons of Heth is full of touching and deep interest, and is especially noteworthy as a revelation of Abraham's inner life.

Abraham confesses that he is a 'stranger and sojourner,' and yet by his request for a burial-place

he clearly indicates that he intends to stay in the land of Canaan, and not to return to Mesopotamia. When Eastern sentiment as to burial with ancestors is remembered, this request for a piece of ground in Canaan is a striking testimony to Abraham's faith. He was fully assured that Canaan was the place for him and his descendants, and on this account Sarah is to be buried there. Gen. xxiii.

We notice the perfect courtesy of Abraham in reply to the offers of the people of the land. Whether, as some writers think, all this was mere parleying with a view to a bargain, or whether, as others urge, it was a genuine and sincere offer on the part of the children of Heth, Abraham's attitude stands out in a very beautiful way. Religion is not intended to decrease, but to increase natural politeness, gentlemanliness, and courtesy. Indeed, courtesy is one of the truest marks of a genuine believer.

Abraham persisted in declining the offer (if it was really intended as an offer) of a burying-place. He was determined that Sarah should not be buried in any land but his own. It must not be hired; it must not be given. Till God's time came Abraham would not be a debtor to those who were to be dispossessed. 'By faith' he refused.

Payment was consequently made, and everything was done in due form in the presence of witnesses. Thus, the first foothold in the land of Canaan that Abraham ever had was bought. Notwithstanding all God's promises of that land to him and to his seed, Abraham would not deal

Gen. xxiii. unjustly, even in appearance, with those then in possession of Canaan.

V. Love (vers. 19, 20).

V. *Love* (vers. 19, 20).—The funeral brings us to the first grave of which we have any record in Holy Writ. The last offices of respect were paid, and the lonely old man went back to his home.

The possession of the property was guaranteed to Abraham and 'made sure' for a perpetual possession. Visitors to Hebron to-day are still shown what is called Abraham's Tomb, and, although no Christian is allowed to enter and explore for himself, there does not seem much doubt as to the genuineness of the tradition which associates the present place with the cave of Machpelah. What an inspiring thought to realise that very likely the bodies of the patriarchs are still there, and that some day they will be exposed to view!

Suggestions for Meditation.

From this simple and touching story of death in the home we may learn how we should behave in times of bereavement. The true attitude at such times is threefold:—

1. *Sorrowing Love.*—The expression of love in sorrow is as natural as it is inevitable and beautiful. A consciousness of loss cannot fail to produce sorrow, and no one is to be blamed for feeling and expressing a sense of bereavement. It would be utterly unnatural if death were to come without eliciting sorrow.

2. *Faithful Service.*—At the same time, in order that the soul may not be swallowed up with over-

much sorrow, there comes to us all at such occasions the call to and opportunity for definite service. The memory of a loved one is best treasured by doing what that loved one would wish were she here. Service always prevents sorrow from becoming dissipated in idle regrets and mere remembrance. Gen. xxiii.

3. *Blessed Hope.*—Abraham laid Sarah's body to rest 'in sure and certain hope' of a joyful resurrection (Heb. xi. 14). It was this above all things that upheld and strengthened him as he bade farewell to the wife who had shared his joys and sorrows for so many years. The expectation and anticipation of reunion in Christ on the Day of Resurrection is still the real hope, the blessed comfort, and the strong inspiration of the people of God. It enables us to look upon death without fear, and to look forward without dread. 'In the midst of death we are in life' through Him who is the Resurrection and the Life.

XXXI

THE EVENING OF LIFE

Gen. xxiv. 1-9—xxv. 1-10.

And Abraham was old, *and* well stricken in age: and the Lord had blessed Abraham in all things.

And Abraham said unto his eldest servant of his house, that ruled over all that he had, Put, I pray thee, thy hand under my thigh:

And I will make thee swear by the Lord, the God of heaven, and the God of the earth, that thou shalt not take a wife unto my son of the daughters of the Canaanites, among whom I dwell:

But thou shalt go unto my country, and to my kindred, and take a wife unto my son Isaac.

And the servant said unto him, Peradventure the woman will not be willing to follow me unto this land: must I needs bring thy son again unto the land from whence thou camest?

And Abraham said unto him, Beware thou that thou bring not my son thither again.

The Lord God of heaven, which took me from my father's house, and from the land of my kindred, and which spake unto me, and that sware unto me, saying, Unto thy seed will I give this land; he shall send his angel before thee, and thou shalt take a wife unto my son from thence.

And if the woman will not be willing to follow thee, then thou shalt be clear from this my oath: only bring not my son thither again.

And the servant put his hand under the thigh of Abraham his master, and sware to him concerning that matter.

Then again Abraham took a wife, and her name *was* Keturah.

And she bare him Zimran, and Jokshan, and Medan, and Midian, and Ishbak, and Shuah.

And Jokshan begat Sheba, and Dedan. And the sons of Dedan were Asshurim, and Letushim, and Leummim.

The Evening of Life

And the sons of Midian; Ephah, and Epher, and Hanoch and Abidah, and Eldaah. All these *were* the children of Keturah.

And Abraham gave all that he had unto Isaac.

But unto the sons of the concubines, which Abraham had Abraham gave gifts, and sent them away from Isaac his son, while he yet lived, eastward, unto the east country.

And these *are* the days of the years of Abraham's life which he lived, an hundred threescore and fifteen years.

Then Abraham gave up the ghost, and died in a good old age, an old man, and full *of years*; and was gathered to his people.

And his sons Isaac and Ishmael buried him in the cave of Machpelah, in the field of Ephron the son of Zohar the Hittite, which *is* before Mamre;

The field which Abraham purchased of the sons of Heth: there was Abraham buried, and Sarah his wife.

THERE is scarcely anything more beautiful and inspiring than the calm, bright, peaceful close of a long and honoured life. Like a summer sunset, it floods the whole scene with brightness and glory. 'The hoary head is a crown of glory' as it sinks to rest after a life's long day spent 'in the way of righteousness.' So it was with Abraham, as we can see from the passages which record his closing years. Gen. xxiv. 1-9—xxv. 1-10.

I. *Crowning Experiences* (xxiv. 1-9).—Abraham's was an old age happily spent in continued enjoyment of the Divine blessing (ver. 1). 'The Lord had blessed Abraham in all things.' These words sum up the whole of Abraham's life and experiences, and now in old age he is still rejoicing in the consciousness of God's presence and favour. 'The blessing of the Lord it maketh rich, and He addeth no sorrow with it' (Prov. x. 22; *cf.* Ps. xxxvii. 22). I. Crowning Experiences (chap. xxiv. 1-9).

Gen. xxiv. 1-9—xxv. 1-10.

His was an old age marked by persistent faithfulness to the Divine will (vers. 2-4). Abraham still clings with undiminished faith and persistence to the revelation of God concerning him and his seed. He is therefore urgent that his son should not take a wife from the daughters of the Canaanites. The commission which he now gives to his trusted servant (perhaps Eliezer, chap. xv. 2) shows clearly that he desires and determines to follow closely the Divine will. The oath mentioned here and in chapter xlvii. 29 only occurs in these two passages in the Old Testament. It betokens a specially solemn engagement, though the reason of the precise form and method is practically unknown, and is therefore variously interpreted. A somewhat similar form of oath has been found in Australia (Driver, *Genesis*, p. 231).

His was an old age characterised by deep insight into the Divine purpose (vers. 6, 7). The servant naturally asks what is to be done if the woman of his kindred is unwilling to take the long journey into Canaan. Abraham promptly and briefly replies that in any case his son is not to be taken out of Canaan. Whatever happens, Abraham is perfectly clear that God's will must be done and His purpose maintained.

His was an old age possessed of absolute assurance of the Divine favour (vers. 7-9). He tells the servant that God, who had been with him all through his long life, would prosper

the errand, and bring about that which was desired. At the same time the servant is once more enjoined not to take his son out of the land, and in the event of the unwillingness of the woman to come the servant will be clear of his oath. Thereupon the solemn promise was made, and the servant at once set out on that errand which, as we shall see, was crowned with Divine favour and success. The details of the story of his meeting with Rebekah, and the subsequent marriage, will come before us in the next chapter. We would now merely call renewed attention to this beautiful picture of an honoured old age, loyal to God at all costs, 'satisfied with favour, full with the blessing of the Lord.'

Gen. xxiv. 1-9—xxv. 1-10.

II. *Closing Events* (xxv. 1-10).—It is evident that Abraham's closing years were marked by a fresh accession of bodily and mental vigour, as can be seen from the statements included in this section.

II. Closing Events (chap. xxv. 1-10).

After the events recorded in the last chapter, culminating in the marriage of Isaac, Abraham in his solitude took to himself another wife, Keturah. At the same time the narrative makes it quite evident that she did not occupy the same rank of equality as Sarah did (ver. 6; 1 Chron. i. 32). It is interesting and significant to notice that one of the sons of Abraham's second marriage was Midian, whose descendants became the intensely bitter foes of the descendants of Isaac.

Gen. xxiv. 1-9—xxv. 1-10. Abraham was careful to make Isaac's position perfectly clear, and, by providing for his other sons and sending them away 'eastward, unto the east country,' he took the necessary steps to maintain Isaac's position free from possible difficulties. Abraham thus sets possessors of wealth a good example in the careful and complete provision which he made during his lifetime for his family.

At length, at the age of one hundred and seventy-five years he passed away, seventy-five years after the birth of Isaac and thirty-five years after the marriage of the latter with Rebekah (chap. xxi. 5; xxv. 20). The description of his death (ver. 8) is very beautiful, and it is interesting to note that he was 'gathered to his people,' referring to their reunion in the unseen world. It is obvious that this phrase cannot possibly refer to his burial, since only Sarah's body was in that tomb. (*Cf.* chap. xxxv. 29; xlix. 33.)

The two sons, Isaac and Ishmael, met over their father's dead body to pay the last tokens of respect. Death is the great healer of family differences and personal feuds.

III. Characteristic Elements. III. *Characteristic Elements.* — Looking over the whole of Abraham's life, we cannot but be struck with certain outstanding points in his character. Dr Candlish, in his suggestive lectures on Genesis, divides the patriarch's life into two main sections; the first of these (chaps. xii.-xv.) he characterises as the time of *faith*,

when Abraham was *accepting* the present gifts of God; the second (chaps. xvi.-xxiv.) he characterises as the period of *patience*, when Abraham was *expecting* the future inheritance promised to him. The following elements may, however, be seen throughout the whole of his life. Gen. xxiv. 1-9—xxv. 1-10.

His Faith.—He took God at His word at each step of his career, and his simple trust in the Divine promise is the predominant feature of his life.

His Faithfulness.—He is rightly described as 'faithful Abraham' (Gal. iii. 9), for he not only believed, but expressed his belief in life. God's promise had its outcome in Abraham's practice; his faith was proved by faithfulness.

His Fear.—By this is meant his attitude of reverence. Notwithstanding the familiar terms on which he lived with God, he never forgot the relative position of the Divine Majesty and his own nothingness.

His Fellowship.—As we have already seen, the latter portion of his life was marked by a great access of spiritual experience and blessing, which led him into full friendship and fellowship with God. This was with Abraham, as it is now with the believer, the culminating point of all spiritual life.

Suggestions for Meditation.

As we review the entire life of Abraham, and consider it specially from God's standpoint, we cannot help being struck with the threefold

Gen. xxiv. 1-9—xxv. 1-10.

exemplification which is so evident all through the story.

1. *The Divine Purpose.*—One thing above all others marked the attitude of God in relation to Abraham: *His will was to be done.* From first to last this was God's purpose. He had in view not merely the manifestation of what a life could be, but also, and perhaps chiefly, the choice of Abraham as the instrument of furthering His great purposes of redemption through the promised Messiah. Whether we think of Abraham personally or as the ancestor of the Messiah, we cannot help learning this one lesson, that believers are placed upon this earth for the one purpose above all others of fulfilling the Divine will. 'Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven.'

2. *The Divine Power.*—God never commands without enabling, and in order that His purpose might be fulfilled He provided needful strength for Abraham. *God's grace was to be accepted.* It is as true to-day as ever that 'As thy days so shall thy strength be,' and the grace of God will always be found sufficient for carrying out His will and purpose.

3. *The Divine Plan.*—The practical question remains as to how, and by what means, the Divine purpose can be accomplished and the Divine power utilised by man. The answer is found in the life of Abraham. *God's word was to be believed.* When faith responds to the Divine promise the Divine power is at once given, and through that power the Divine purpose is per-

fectly accomplished. On the one hand God assures the believer, 'My grace is sufficient for thee'; and on the other the believer responds, 'I can do all things through Him Who is empowering me.'

Gen. xxiv. 1-9—xxv. 1-10.

XXXII

THE MODEL SERVANT

Gen. xxiv. 10-67

And the servant took ten camels of the camels of his master, and departed; for all the goods of his master *were* in his hand: and he arose, and went to Mesopotamia, unto the city of Nahor.

And he made his camels to kneel down without the city by a well of water at the time of the evening, *even* the time that women go out to draw *water*.

And he said, O Lord God of my master Abraham, I pray Thee, send me good speed this day, and shew kindness unto my master Abraham.

Behold, I stand *here* by the well of water; and the daughters of the men of the city come out to draw water:

And let it come to pass, that the damsel to whom I shall say, Let down thy pitcher, I pray thee, that I may drink; and she shall say, Drink, and I will give thy camels drink also: *let the same be* she *that* Thou hast appointed for Thy servant Isaac; and thereby shall I know that Thou hast shewed kindness unto my master.

And it came to pass, before he had done speaking, that, behold, Rebekah came out, who was born to Bethuel, son of Milcah, the wife of Nahor, Abraham's brother, with her pitcher upon her shoulder.

And the damsel *was* very fair to look upon, a virgin, neither had any man known her: and she went down to the well, and filled her pitcher, and came up.

And the servant ran to meet her, and said, Let me, I pray thee, drink a little water of thy pitcher.

And she said, Drink, my lord: and she hasted, and let down her pitcher upon her hand, and gave him drink.

And when she had done giving him drink, she said, I will draw *water* for thy camels also, until they have done drinking.

And she hasted, and emptied her pitcher into the trough, and ran again unto the well to draw *water*, and drew for all his camels.

And the man wondering at her held his peace, to wit whether the Lord had made his journey prosperous or not.

And it came to pass, as the camels had done drinking, that the man took a golden earring of half a shekel weight, and two bracelets for her hands of ten *shekels* weight of gold;

And said, Whose daughter *art* thou? tell me, I pray thee: is there room *in* thy father's house for us to lodge in?

And she said unto him, I *am* the daughter of Bethuel the son of Milcah, which she bare unto Nahor.

She said moreover unto him, We have both straw and provender enough, and room to lodge in.

And the man bowed down his head, and worshipped the Lord.

And he said, Blessed *be* the Lord God of my master Abraham, Who hath not left destitute my master of His mercy and His truth: I *being* in the way, the Lord led me to the house of my master's brethren.

And the damsel ran, and told *them of* her mother's house these things.

And Rebekah had a brother, and his name *was* Laban: and Laban ran out unto the man, unto the well.

And it came to pass, when he saw the earring and bracelets upon his sister's hands, and when he heard the words of Rebekah his sister, saying, Thus spake the man unto me; that he came unto the man; and, behold, he stood by the camels at the well.

And he said, Come in, thou blessed of the Lord; wherefore standest thou without? for I have prepared the house, and room for the camels.

And the man came into the house: and he ungirded his camels, and gave straw and provender for the camels, and water to wash his feet, and the men's feet that *were* with him.

And there was set *meat* before him to eat: but he said, I will not eat, until I have told mine errand. And he said, Speak on.

And he said, I *am* Abraham's servant.

And the Lord hath blessed my master greatly; and he is become great: and He hath given him flocks, and herds, and silver, and gold, and menservants, and maidservants, and camels, and asses.

And Sarah my master's wife bare a son to my master when she was old: and unto him hath he given all that he hath.

And my master made me swear, saying, Thou shalt not take a wife to my son of the daughters of the Canaanites, in whose land I dwell:

But thou shalt go unto my father's house, and to my kindred, and take a wife unto my son.

And I said unto my master, Peradventure the woman will not follow me.

And he said unto me, The Lord, before whom I walk, will send His angel with thee, and prosper thy way; and thou shalt take a wife for my son of my kindred, and of my father's house:

Then shalt thou be clear from *this* my oath, when thou comest to my kindred; and if they give not thee *one*, thou shalt be clear from my oath.

And I came this day unto the well, and said, O Lord God of my master Abraham, if now Thou do prosper my way which I go:

Behold, I stand by the well of water: and it shall come to pass, that when the virgin cometh forth to draw *water*, and I say to her, Give me, I pray thee, a little water of thy pitcher to drink;

And she say to me, Both drink thou, and I will also draw for thy camels: *let* the same *be* the woman whom the Lord hath appointed out for my master's son.

And before I had done speaking in mine heart, behold, Rebekah came forth with her pitcher on her shoulder; and she went down unto the well, and drew *water*: and I said unto her, Let me drink, I pray thee.

And she made haste, and let down her pitcher from her *shoulder*, and said, Drink, and I will give thy camels drink also: so I drank, and she made the camels drink also.

And I asked her, and said, Whose daughter *art* thou? And she said, The daughter of Bethuel, Nahor's son, whom Milcah bare unto him: and I put the earring upon her face, and the bracelets upon her hands.

And I bowed down my head, and worshipped the Lord, and blessed the Lord God of my master Abraham, which had led me in the right way to take my master's brother's daughter unto his son.

And now if ye will deal kindly and truly with my master, tell me: and if not, tell me; that I may turn to the right hand, or to the left.

Then Laban and Bethuel answered and said, The thing proceedeth from the Lord: we cannot speak unto thee bad or good.

Behold, Rebekah *is* before thee, take *her*, and go, and let her be thy master's son's wife, as the Lord hath spoken.

And it came to pass, that, when Abraham's servant heard their words, he worshipped the Lord, *bowing himself* to the earth.

And the servant brought forth jewels of silver, and jewels of gold, and raiment, and gave *them* to Rebekah: he gave also to her brother and to her mother precious things.

And they did eat and drink, he and the men that *were* with him, and tarried all night; and they rose up in the morning, and he said, Send me away unto my master.

The Model Servant

And her brother and her mother said, Let the damsel abide with us *a few* days, at the least ten; after that she shall go.

And he said unto them, Hinder me not, seeing the Lord hath prospered my way; send me away that I may go to my master.

And they said, We will call the damsel, and enquire at her mouth.

And they called Rebekah, and said unto her, Wilt thou go with this man? And she said, I will go.

And they sent away Rebekah their sister, and her nurse, and Abraham's servant, and his men.

And they blessed Rebekah, and said unto her, Thou *art* our sister, be thou *the mother* of thousands of millions, and let thy seed possess the gate of those which hate them.

And Rebekah arose, and her damsels, and they rode upon the camels, and followed the man: and the servant took Rebekah, and went his way.

And Isaac came from the way of the well Lahai-roi; for he dwelt in the south country.

And Isaac went out to meditate in the field at the eventide: and he lifted up his eyes, and saw, and, behold, the camels *were* coming.

And Rebekah lifted up her eyes, and when she saw Isaac, she lighted off the camel.

For she *had* said unto the servant, What man *is* this that walketh in the field to meet us? And the servant *had* said, It *is* my master: therefore she took a vail, and covered herself.

And the servant told Isaac all things that he had done.

And Isaac brought her into his mother Sarah's tent, and took Rebekah, and she became his wife; and he loved her: and Isaac was comforted after his mother's *death*.

WE have already considered Abraham's part in this search of a bride for his son Isaac, but the chapter is so full of interesting and vivid detail that it needs careful attention from the standpoint of Abraham's servant, whose attitude and action illustrate in the highest degree the qualities of true service. We may, therefore, fitly regard him as a model for all who are called upon to work for God. Several characteristics of his service call for attention. Gen. xxiv. 10-67.

I. *Intelligent Obedience* (vers. 1-9).—He was at

Gen. xxiv. 10-67.

hand ready for work, and upon being told what was required of him met his master's commands by an evident desire for information (ver. 5). His service was an intelligent service, and he wished to know what was to be done under certain contingencies that might present themselves. God always welcomes inquiries from His servants concerning His will (John xvi. 19). On being assured by his master of the Divine guidance he at once pledged himself to Abraham, and took a solemn oath of faithfulness to duty.

I. Intelligent Obedience (vers. 1-9).

II. Zealous Interest (vers. 10-14).

II. *Zealous Interest* (vers. 10-14).—With promptitude the servant set out on his important errand, and we can see from the entire narrative that he was fully identified with the object of his quest. His was no mere slavery, for it was an evident delight to him to do his master's bidding, and to seek for a bride for his son.

The true spirit of the man is seen in his earnest prayer for guidance (ver. 12); his task was a difficult one. He was on a very unlikely and unusual errand, and so he prays that the God of his master would give him good success. Not only does he pray for guidance, but for grace (vers. 13, 14). He seeks to know the road, and then asks for power to walk along it. He requests opportunities, and then grace to use them. There is scarcely anything more touching and beautiful than this prayer, especially in its emphasis upon his master, and his desire that God would show kindness to Abraham.

Happy are those masters who have such a servant as this, and happy are those servants able to pray in this way for their masters. Gen. xxiv. 10-67.

III. *The Holy Tact* (vers. 15-33).—It is impossible for us to dwell in exhaustive detail on all the interesting and beautiful touches of this full narrative. We cannot, however, fail to notice his perfect courtesy (ver. 17). Manner counts for a very great deal in all Christian work. We may spoil a good cause by our lack of considerateness and courtesy. We observe, too, his patience (ver. 21). He will not force matters, for there must be no hurry. The man is filled with a holy watchfulness for every indication of the will of God. 'The man looked steadfastly on her, holding his peace, to know whether the Lord had made his journey prosperous or not.' III. Holy Tact (vers. 15-33).

The wisdom of the man is equally evident (ver. 22). He brings out what would be perfectly known to the young girl as bridal gifts, and offers them first before approaching the subject of his errand, or mentioning the person of his master or his master's son. We cannot fail to observe his reverence and thankfulness as he realises that his prayer has been answered, and that God has indeed guided him in the way. Not least of all is the man's intense earnestness (ver. 33). He would not eat or rest until he had told his errand; his master's cause must come first.

IV. *Loving Faithfulness* (vers. 34-49).—Again we are impressed with the combination of wisdom

Gen. xxiv. 10-67.

IV. Loving Faithfulness (vers. 34-49).

and faithfulness in all that the servant says and does. He states his position at once with dignity and humility (ver. 34). He is loud in the praises of his master, and tells them in brief his history (vers. 35, 36). He then declares definitely the object of his errand (vers. 37-48), and makes the proposal, offering a definite choice to the relatives of the young woman whom he had met at the well (ver. 49).

V. Blessed Success (vers. 50-67).

V. *Blessed Success* (vers. 50-67).—There are difficulties in the way, as they point out, but they are willing that Rebekah should go, only they ask him to allow her to remain a few days before the departure. The man, however, is decided; his master's business requires haste, and he urges upon them the necessity of instant decision. Rebekah at once, and with definiteness, says, 'I will go,' and thus the journey home was commenced.

Soon the purpose of the servant is accomplished. He introduces Rebekah to Isaac, and the servant retires to tell his aged master what he has done. The servant disappears from view at this point with fitness and appropriateness, but we are sure that he received his 'well done' from Abraham, and entered into the joy of his master in the accomplishment of the task appointed to him.

Suggestions for Meditation.

In addition to the lessons of Christian service already observed in our study of the chapter it is possible, and we believe legitimate, to regard this story as an illustration of still higher truths. The

length of the chapter in a book whose spiritual purpose is evident at every stage seems to compel the thought that the full detail in these sixty-seven verses must have some deeper meaning than appears on the surface. Spiritual commentators have consequently not been slow to find herein the seeds of profound spiritual truths. Doubtless our forefathers went too far in the direction of spiritualising the Old Testament narratives, but it is equally possible for us to go to the other extreme, and to see nothing of the kind in them. If it be ever borne in mind that such a spiritual use of the narrative is secondary and not primary, that it is application not interpretation, and if moreover we avoid fanciful details and confine ourselves to leading lines of spiritual suggestion, the method is not only legitimate but essentially helpful. Let us therefore look at some of these suggestions that are often brought out of this chapter. Gen. xxiv. 10-67.

1. *The purpose of the father.*—The father has but one purpose in this chapter, to seek a bride for his son. 'A certain king made a marriage feast for his son' (Matt. xxii. 2).

2. *The position of the son.*—The son is the father's one thought, and in him all his purposes are to be fulfilled (ver. 36). So also is it in regard to the Son of God (Eph. i. 20-22).

3. *The prospects of the bride.*—The bride was thought of before she herself knew it (ver. 4), and arrangements were made for her to be offered the position of wife to Isaac. 'He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should

Gen. xxiv. 10-67.

be holy and without blemish before Him in love' (Eph. i. 4).

4. *The proclamation of the servant.*—The one object of the servant was the announcement of Abraham's purpose, which carried with it the revelation concerning the son, and the offer to Rebekah. How wonderfully he proclaimed the vast resources of the father (ver. 35), and the glory of the son (ver. 36). In like manner the Holy Spirit through the mouths of Christian preachers is continually proclaiming the glory of Christ. Is it not something more than a coincidence that we have such striking words in St John xvi. 14, 15?

5. *The power of the message.*—The success of the servant in attracting Rebekah to go with him is very noteworthy. In like manner, Christ, if He be lifted up, will draw men to Himself. There is nothing so attractive as the preaching of a free and full Gospel (John xii. 32).

6. *The progress of the soul.*—The decision of Rebekah and her determination to go is another striking point of the narrative. She believed the servant's word based upon the evidences of Abraham's good faith. She ventured everything and went. So is it with the soul that rests upon the Word of God based upon the certainty of those things wherein we have been instructed. Faith ventures and finds itself justified. Faith steps on the seeming void and finds the rock beneath.

7. *The prospect of the home.*—Rebekah in coming to Canaan finds a husband, her true life, and her

permanent home. The soul coming to Christ enters into true fellowship, rejoices even now in eternal life, and knows that in God's good time there will be the Canaan above, the rest for the people of God.

Gen. xxiv. 10-67.

XXXIII

THE FATHER OF THE FAITHFUL

BEFORE passing on to the story of Isaac, and the record of the development of the Divine purpose with Abraham and his descendants, it will be useful to dwell once more on the life and character of Abraham as a whole.

None of the lives recorded in the Old Testament made a deeper impression or became more prominent in after ages than that of Abraham. His position as the founder of the Jewish nation, and his character as the pattern and type of believers in all ages, have given him a very important place in Holy Scripture. The following summary of passages may serve as a guide to fuller and detailed study.

I. In the Old Testament—

Abraham in the Old Testament.

The Scripture Record.—It is evident to the most casual reader that wherever Abraham is mentioned he is always assumed to have been a veritable historic personage. There is no possibility of his being regarded as an 'eponymous hero.' That he existed, that he had the experiences recorded in the Book

of Genesis, and that he was the personal, definite, historic founder of the Jewish nation are always regarded as simple matters of fact.

The Gracious Covenant (Exod. ii. 24).—'God remembered His covenant with Abraham.' This Abrahamic covenant is often referred to in times subsequent to the patriarch, and is regarded as the foundation of everything in connection with God's dealings with Israel.

The Divine Title (Exod. iii. 6).—'I am . . . the God of Abraham.' This title of God in relation to the patriarch is full of spiritual reality and blessedness, and is dwelt on in later books with evident satisfaction. It is especially precious as a spiritual fact in the light of Heb. xi. 16: 'God is not ashamed to be called their God.'

The Special Appeal (Isa. li. 2).—'Look unto Abraham your father . . . for I . . . blessed him.' God here uses Abraham and His own dealings with the patriarch as a reminder to Israel and an assurance to His people in captivity that He will bless them also, as He had blessed their ancestor. The unchanging faithfulness of God is one of the foundation truths of Holy Scripture.

The Definite Plea (1 Kings xviii. 36).—'Lord God of Abraham.' Elijah bases his prayer on God's relation to Abraham. He uses it as a reason for God's answer to His prayer, and His manifestation in the face of idolatry. In like manner Moses put forth the same plea: 'Remember Abraham . . . to whom Thou swarest . . . and saidst' (Exod. xxxii. 13; Deut. ix. 27). Believers have a blessed and holy

right to plead God's faithfulness to their forefathers as a reason for continued help.

The Unique Relationship (2 Chron. xx. 7).—'Abraham, Thy friend.' (*Cf.* Isa. xli. 8.) He is the only personage in the Old Testament who has this high and privileged title. To this day in Arabia *El Khalil* ('God's friend') is used of Abraham.

A careful study of these and other passages, especially in the Psalms, will reveal a wealth of spiritual teaching associated with Abraham and the Divine Covenant made with him.

II. In the New Testament—

Abraham in the New Testament.

The Record of his Life.—Here again we are face to face with the simple fact that all the New Testament writers regard Abraham as a genuine personage, and no mere mythical hero. Whether we study passages like Acts vii. or Romans iv. or Hebrews xi., or dwell upon particular verses in the Gospels and elsewhere, there is only one interpretation possible; the New Testament accepts, endorses, and uses the Old Testament testimony to Abraham, and it is not too much to say that no one with his New Testament in his hand can hesitate for an instant as to the true meaning and genuine implications of the references to the patriarch.

His Relation to the Messiah.—The genealogy given by St Matthew (i. 1) traces our Lord's connection with Abraham and clearly teaches that the Messiah 'took on Him the seed

of Abraham' (Heb. ii. 16). This fact in the first Gospel, which is essentially the Gospel for the Jews, shows the historic root of the Messianic expectation. Looking at Abraham's relation to the Messiah from another standpoint, we notice what may be called his spiritual anticipation of the Messiah: 'Abraham rejoiced to see My day' (John viii. 56). What this sight of the Messianic day really meant and included it is now impossible to say. We must be on our guard against assuming too much spiritual knowledge or against almost entirely denying it. Probably on the occasion of the great events recorded in Gen. xv., and especially in Gen. xxii., Abraham had a spiritual vision given of Him in Whom all the promises were to be completely fulfilled.

His Relation to the Jews.—We can see from several passages the national and individual pride felt in Abraham (Matt. iii. 9; John viii. 39). A poor woman is spoken of by our Lord as 'a daughter of Abraham' (Luke xiii. 16), and the highest and most precious view of the future life to the Jews seems to have been 'Abraham's bosom' (Luke xvi. 22). We can see from all this how profound was the Jewish reverence for their great ancestor. The pride was in some respects perfectly natural and legitimate, though in the result it became a stumbling-block and a danger to them, since they rested in their lineal descent and forgot the need of spiritual affinity and kinship.

Aspects of his Spiritual Life.

The above passages are concerned with general references to Abraham. In the four passages that follow he is used by the writers for the purpose of conveying special spiritual teaching, and it is to be noted carefully that each passage by itself has one main thought about Abraham. There is no repetition, but four different aspects of his spiritual life are dwelt upon.

His Righteousness by Faith (Rom. iv.).—This is the main thought of the entire chapter, in which the Apostle sets out to prove that Abraham became righteous not by works but by faith. Righteousness in Romans, as also in Genesis xv., is much more than justification, and from first to last we are to understand that Abraham became righteous by faith in God (vers. 3, 13, 21, 22).

His Spiritual Seed (Gal. iii.; iv. 22-31).—Another aspect of Abraham's life is here considered. The key-thought of the whole passage is the relation of Abraham to the great spiritual seed of believers of whom he is the father (iii. 9, 16, 26, 29; iv. 31). The Apostle is emphasising the great outstanding reality of spiritual kinship with Abraham through faith, and all that faith brings of sonship to God and liberty.

His Life of Faith (Heb. xi. 8-19).—It is interesting to notice that three times in the New Testament the words of the prophet, 'The just shall live by faith' (Hab. ii. 4), are quoted, but each time with a special emphasis. Taking the words as they stand in the Greek, 'The just by faith shall live,' we notice that in Romans i. 17

the emphasis is on '*the just*'; in Galatians iii. 11 it is on '*by faith*'; in Hebrews x. 38 it is on '*shall live*'; and the result is that the great chapter, Hebrews xi., is concerned with illustrations of the life of faith—that is, with faith as the spiritual principle and power of the entire life of the believer from the beginning to the end. Consequently Abraham is there described as manifesting various characteristics of the attitude of faith—*e.g.* his obedience of faith (ver. 8); his patience of faith (ver. 9); his expectation of faith (ver. 10); his consecration of faith (ver. 17). The entire passage shows the various ways in which faith manifests itself as the fundamental power of daily living.

His Faith and Works (Jas. ii. 21-24).—This passage, as is well known, has given rise to great controversy, but there surely was no need of much difference of opinion. St Paul uses the story recorded in Genesis xv. as a proof that Abraham was justified by faith. St James uses the event recorded in Genesis xxii., which occurred twenty-five years after, as a proof that Abraham was justified by works. Seeing, then, that for twenty-five years Abraham's relationship with God was of faith, it is evident that Genesis xxii. is the crown and culmination of that faith, and is proved by Abraham's act of offering Isaac. 'Faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect' (Jas. ii. 22). Works are the evidential proof of faith. As Calvin has aptly said, while it is faith alone that justifies, the faith that justifies is never alone.

Suggestions for Meditation.

Let us now sum up the entire record of Abraham's life as found in Holy Scripture, and dwell upon it from God's standpoint and from his own. We may see in it a revelation of true life.

1. *Life's choicest privilege.*—What is this? It is to be associated with God, as was Abraham; to be lifted up into union with God and into fellowship with His Divine purposes of blessing for the world. We can easily imagine what Abraham would have been without this privilege. Now, however, he is for ever associated with God, and God is called 'the God of Abraham' (Luke xx. 37). Such is the case with every believer. God lifts him out of the mire of sin and raises him to a position of high privilege, transforming his life and enabling him to realise the Divine will.

2. *Life's strong foundation.*—What is this? It is God's covenant with man. This was at the basis of everything with Abraham. This, too, was what David rested on and rejoiced in; 'the everlasting covenant, ordered in all things and sure' (2 Sam. xxiii. 5). This is still the foundation of the believer's life and tower of hope, the new covenant in Christ (Heb. viii. 10-12). A life lived in the consciousness of an everlasting covenant made between God the Father and God the Son on behalf of the believer and sealed to him by the Holy Spirit makes life strong, peaceful, and satisfied.

3. *Life's greatest glory.*—What is this? It is faithfulness to God. The one thing needful is not

success, but sincerity; not glory, but goodness; not honour, but holiness. A humble, consistent, earnest life, lived to the praise of God, is the greatest life that can be lived; and this, on the whole, was the characteristic of Abraham's life. He witnessed to the reality of God and His grace.

4. *Life's simple secret.*—What is this? It is faith—faith believing God's word and trusting God Himself. Faith rests on God, receives from God, responds to God, relies on God, realises God, rejoices in God, and reproduces His life and character. In proportion to our faith will everything else be. 'By faith' is the simple but all-embracing secret of daily living. So it was with Abraham, so it has ever been, so it ever will be until 'Faith is changed to sight and hope with glory crowned.'

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